WARRIOR GAP

By CAPTAIN CHARLES KING U·S·A·

Elma & Lorenzo Davis

Warrior Gap

A Story of the Sioux Outbreak of '68.

BY

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"Fort Frayne," "An Army Wife," "Trumpeter Fred,"
"Found in the Philippines," "A Wounded Name,"
"Noble Blood and a West Point Parallel,"
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WARRIOR GAP.

1.

Riding at ease in the lazy afternoon sunshine a single troop of cavalry was threading its way in long column of twos through the bold and beautiful foothills of the Big Horn. Behind them, glinting in the slanting rays, Cloud Peak, snow clad still although it was late in May, towered above the pine-crested summits of the range. To the right and left of the winding trail bare shoulders of bluff, covered only by the dense carpet of bunch grass, jutted out into the comparative level of the eastward plain. A clear, cold, sparkling stream, on whose banks the little command had halted for a noontide rest, went rollicking away northeastward, and many a veteran trooper looked longingly, even regretfully, after it, and then cast a gloomy glance over the barren and desolate stretch ahead. Far as the eye could reach in that direction the earth waves heaved and rolled in unrelieved monotony to the very sky line, save where here and there along the

slopes black herds or scattered dots of buffalo were grazing unvexed by hunters red or white, for this was thirty years ago, when, in countless thousands, the bison covered the westward prairies, and there were officers who forbade their senseless slaughter to make food only for the worthless, prowling coyotes. No wonder the trooper hated to leave the foothills of the mountains, with the cold, clear trout streams and the bracing air, to take to long days' marching over dull waste and treeless prairie, covered only by sage brush, rent and torn by dry ravines, shadeless, springless, almost waterless, save where in unwholesome hollows dull pools of stagnant water still held out against the sun, or, further still southeast among the "breaks" of the many forks of the South Cheyenne, on the sandy flats men dug for water for their suffering horses, yet shrank from drinking it themselves lest their lips should crack and bleed through the shriveling touch of the alkali.

Barely two years a commissioned officer, the young lieutenant at the head of column rode buoyantly along, caring little for the landscape, since with every traversed mile he found himself just that much nearer home. Twenty-five summers, counting this one coming, had rolled over his curly head, and each one had seemed brighter, happier

than the last, all but the one he spent as a hard-worked "plebe" at the military academy. His graduation summer two years previous was a glory to him, as well as to a pretty sister, young and enthusiastic enough to think a brother in the regulars, just out of West Point, something to be made much of, and Jessie Dean had lost no opportunity of spoiling her soldier or of wearying her school friends through telling of his manifold perfections. He was a manly, stalwart, handsome fellow as young graduates go, and old ones wish they might go over again. He was a fond and not too teasing kind of brother. He wasn't the brightest fellow in the class by thirty odd, and had barely scraped through one or two of his examinations, but Jessie proudly pointed to the fact that much more than half the class had "scraped off" entirely, and therefore that those who succeeded in getting through at all were paragons, especially Brother Marshall. But girls at that school had brothers of their own, girls who had never seen West Point or had the cadet fever, and were not impressed with young officers as painted by so indulgent a sister. Most of the girls had tired of Jessie's talks, and some had told her so, but there was one who had been sympathetic from the start—a far Western, friendless sort of girl she was when first she entered school, uncouthly

dressed, wretchedly homesick and anything but companionable, and yet Jessie Dean's kind heart had warmed to this friendless waif and she became her champion, her ally, and later, much to her genuine surprise, almost her idol. It presently transpired that "the Pappoose," as the girls nicknamed her because it was learned that she had been rocked in an Indian cradle and had long worn moccasins instead of shoes (which accounted for her feet being so much finer in their shape than those of her fellows), was quick and intelligent beyond her years, that, though apparently hopelessly behind in all their studies at the start, and provoking ridicule and sneers during the many weeks of her loneliness and home-longing, she suddenly began settling to her work with grim determination, surprising her teachers and amazing her mates by the vim and originality of her methods, and, before the end of the year, climbing for the laurels with a mental strength and agility that put other efforts to the blush. Then came weeks of bliss spent with a doting father at Niagara, the seashore and the Point—a dear old dad as ill at ease in Eastern circles as his daughter had been at first at school, until he found himself welcomed with open arms to the officers' mess-rooms at the Point, for John Folsom was as noted a frontiersman as ever trod the plains,

a man old officers of the cavalry and infantry knew and honored as "a square trader" in the Indian country—a man whom the Indians themselves loved and trusted far and wide, and when a man has won the trust and faith of an Indian let him grapple it to his breast as a treasure worth the having, great even as "the heart love of a child." Sioux, Shoshone and Cheyenne, they would turn to "Old John" in their councils, their dealings, their treaties, their perplexities, for when he said a thing was right and square their doubts were gone, and there at the Point the now well-to-do old trader met men who had known him in by-gone days at Laramie and Omaha, and there his pretty schoolgirl daughter met her bosom friend's big brother Marshall, a first classman in all his glory, dancing with damsels in society, while she was but a maiden shy in short dresses. Oh, how Jess had longed to be of that party to the Point, but her home was in the far West, her father long dead and buried, her mother an invalid, and the child was needed there. Earnestly had old Folsom written, begging that she who had been so kind to his little girl should be allowed to visit the seashore and the Point with him and "Pappose," as he laughingly referred to her, adopting the school name given by the girls; but they were proud people, were the Deans, and poor

and sensitive. They thanked Mr. Folsom warmly. "Jessie was greatly needed at her home this summer," was the answer; but Folsom somehow felt it was because they dreaded to accept courtesies they could not repay in kind.

"As if I could ever repay Jess for all the loving kindness to my little girl in her loneliness," said he. No, there was no delicious visiting with Pappoose that summer, but with what eager interest had she not devoured the letters telling of the wonderful sights the little far Westerner saw—the ocean, the great Niagara, the beautiful Point in the heart of the Highlands, but, above all, that crowned monarch, that plumed knight, that incomparable big brother, Cadet Captain Marshall Dean. Yes, he had come to call the very evening of their arrival. He had escorted them out, Papa and Pappoose, to hear the band playing on the Plain. He had made her take his arm, "a schoolgirl in short dresses," and promenaded with her up and down the beautiful, shaded walks, thronged with ladies, officers and cadets, while some old cronies took father away to the mess for a julep, and Mr. Dean had introduced some young girls, professors' daughters, and they had come and taken her driving and to tea, and she had seen him every day, many times a day, at guard mounting, drill, pontooning or parade, or on the

hotel piazzas, but only to look at or speak to for a minute, for of course she was "only a child," and there were dozens of society girls, young ladies, to whom he had to be attentive, especially a very stylish Miss Brockway, from New York, with whom he walked and danced a great deal, and whom the other girls tried to tease about him. Pappoose didn't write it in so many words, but Jessie, reading those letters between the lines and every which way, could easily divine that Pappoose didn't fancy Miss Brockway at all. And then had come a wonderful day, a wonderful thing, into the schoolgirl's life. No less than twelve pages did sixteen-year-old Pappoose take to tell it, and when a girl finds time to write a twelve-page letter from the Point she has more to tell than she can possibly contain. Mr. Dean had actually invited her—*her*, Elinor Merchant Folsom—Winona, as they called her when she was a toddler among the tepees of the Sioux—Pappoose as the girls had named her at school—"Nell," as Jessie called her—sweetest name of all despite the ring of sadness that ever hangs about it—and Daddy had actually smiled and approved her going to the midweek hop on a cadet captain's broad chevroned arm, and she had worn her prettiest white gown, and the girls had brought her roses, and Mr. Dean had called for her before all the big

girls, and she had gone off with him, radiant, and he had actually made out her card for her, and taken three dances himself, and had presented such pleasant fellows—first classmen and "yearlings." There was Mr. Billings, the cadet adjutant, and Mr. Ray, who was a cadet sergeant "cut on furlough" and kept back, but such a beautiful dancer, and there was the first captain, such a witty, brilliant fellow, who only danced square dances, and several cadet corporals, all hop managers, in their red sashes. Why, she was just the proudest girl in the room! And when the drum beat and the hop broke up she couldn't believe she'd been there an hour and three-quarters, and then Mr. Dean escorted her back to the hotel, and Daddy had smiled and looked on and told him he must come into the cavalry when he graduated next June, and he'd show him the Sioux country and Pappoose would teach him the Indian dances. It was all simply lovely. Of course she knew it was all due to Jessie that her splendid big brother should give up a whole evening from his lady friends. (Miss Brockway spoke so patronizingly to her in the hall when the girls were all talking together after the cadets had scurried away to answer tattoo roll-call.) Of course she understood that if it hadn't been for Jessie none of the cadets would have taken the

slightest notice of her, a mere chit, with three years of school still ahead of her. But all the same it was something to live over and over again, and dream of over and over again, and the seashore seemed very stupid after the Point. Next year—next June—when Marshall graduated Jessie was to go and see that wonderful spot, and go she did with Pappoose, too, and though it was all as beautiful as Pappoose had described, and the scene and the music and the parades and all were splendid, there was no deliriously lovely hop, for in those days there could be no dancing in the midst of examinations. There was only the one great ball given by the second to the graduating class, and Marshall had so many, many other and older girls to dance with and say good-by to he had only time for a few words with his sister and her shy, silent little friend with the big brown eyes to whom he had been so kind the previous summer, when there were three hops a week and not so many hoppers in long dresses. Still, Marshall had one dance with each and introduced nice boys from the lower classes, and it was all very well, only not what Pappoose had painted, and Jessie couldn't help thinking and saying it might all have been so much sweeter if it hadn't been for that odious Miss Brockway, about whom Marshall hovered altogether too much, but,

like the little Indian the girls sometimes said she was, Pappoose looked on and said nothing.

All the same, Mr. Dean had had a glorious graduation summer of it, though Jessie saw too little of him, and Pappoose nothing at all after the break-up of the class. In September the girls returned to school, friends as close as ever, even though a little cloud overshadowed the hitherto unbroken confidences, and Marshall joined the cavalry, as old Folsom had suggested, and took to the saddle, the prairie, the bivouac, and buffalo hunt as though native and to the manner born. They were building the Union Pacific then, and he and his troop, with dozens of others scattered along the line, were busy scouting the neighborhood, guarding the surveyors, the engineers, and finally the track-layers, for the jealous red men swarmed in myriads all along the way, lacking only unanimity, organization, and leadership to enable them to defeat the enterprise. And then when the whistling engines passed the forks of the Platte and began to climb up the long slope of the Rockies to Cheyenne and Sherman Pass, the trouble and disaffection spread to tribes far more numerous and powerful further to the north and northwest; and there rose above the hordes of warriors a chief whose name became the synonym for deep-rooted and determined hostility to the whites — Mach-

pealota (Red Cloud)—and old John Folsom, he whom the Indians loved and trusted, grew anxious and troubled, and went from post to post with words of warning on his tongue.

"Gentlemen," he said to the commissioners who came to treat with the Sioux whose hunting grounds adjoined the line of the railway, "it's all very well to have peace with these people here. It is wise to cultivate the friendship of such chiefs as Spotted Tail and Old-Man-Afraid-of-His-Horses but there are irreconcilables beyond them, far more numerous and powerful, who are planning, preaching war this minute. Watch Red Cloud, Red Dog, Little Big Man. Double, treble your garrisons at the posts along the Big Horn; get your women and children out of them, or else abandon the forts entirely. I know those warriors well. They outnumber you twenty to one. Reinforce your garrisons without delay or get out of that country, one of the two. Draw everything south of the Platte while yet there is time."

But wiseacres at Washington said the Indians were peaceable, and all that was needed was a new post and another little garrison at Warrior Gap, in the eastward foothills of the range. Eight hundred thousand dollars would build it, "provided the labor of the troops was utilized," and leave a good margin

for the contractors and "the Bureau." And it was to escort the quartermaster and engineer officer and an aide-de-camp on preliminary survey that "C" Troop of the cavalry, Captain Brooks commanding, had been sent on the march from the North Platte at Frayne to the headwaters of the Powder River in the Hills, and with it went its new first lieutenant, Marshall Dean.

CHAPTER II.

PROMOTION was rapid in the cavalry in those days, so soon after the war. Indians contributed largely to the general move, but there were other causes, too. Dean had served little over a year as second lieutenant in a troop doing duty along the lower Platte, when vacancies occurring gave him speedy and unlooked-for lift. He had met Mr. Folsom only once. The veteran trader had embarked much of his capital in business at Gate City beyond the Rockies, but officers from Fort Emory, close to the new frontier town, occasionally told him he had won a stanch friend in that solid citizen.

"You ought to get transferred to Emory," they said. "Here's the band, half a dozen pretty girls, hops twice a week, hunts and picnics all through the spring and summer in the mountains, fishing *ad libitum*, and lots of fun all the year around." But Dean's ears were oddly deaf. A classmate let fall the observation that it was because of a New York girl who had jilted him that Dean had forsworn society and stuck to a troop in the field; but men

who knew and served with the young fellow found him an enthusiast in his profession, passionately fond of cavalry life in the open, a bold rider, a keen shot and a born hunter. Up with the dawn day after day, in saddle long hours, scouting the divides and ridges, stalking antelope and black-tail deer, chasing buffalo, he lived a life that hardened every muscle, bronzed the skin, cleared the eye and brain, and gave to even monotonous existence a "verve" and zest the dawdlers in those old-time garrisons never knew.

All the long summer of the year after his graduation, from mid-April until November, he never once slept beneath a wooden roof, and more often than not the sky was his only canopy. That summer, too, Jessie spent at home, Pappoose with her most of the time, and one year more would finish them at the reliable old Ohio school. By that time Folsom's handsome new home would be in readiness to receive his daughter at Gate City. By that time, too, Marshall might hope to have a leave and come in to Illinois to welcome his sister and gladden his mother's eyes. But until then, the boy had said to himself, he'd stick to the field, and the troop that had the roughest work to do was the one that best suited him, and so it had happened that by the second spring of his service in the

regiment no subaltern was held in higher esteem by senior officers or regarded with more envy by the lazy ones among the juniors than the young graduate, for those, too, were days in which graduates were few and far between, except in higher grades. Twice had he ridden in the dead of winter the devious trail through the Medicine Bow range to Frayne. Once already had he been sent the long march to and from the Big Horn, and when certain officers were ordered to the mountains early in the spring to locate the site of the new post at Warrior Gap, Brooks's troop, as has been said, went along as escort and Brooks caught mountain fever in the Hills, or some such ailment, and made the home trip in the ambulance, leaving the active command of "C" Troop to his subaltern.

With the selection of the site Dean had nothing to do. Silently he looked on as the quartermaster, the engineer, and a staff officer from Omaha paced off certain lines, took shots with their instruments at neighboring heights, and sampled the sparkling waters of the Fork. Two companies of infantry, sent down from further posts along the northern slopes of the range, had stacked their arms and pitched their "dog tents," and vigilant vedettes and sentries peered over every commanding height and ridge to secure the invaders against surprise. In-

vaders they certainly were from the Indian point of view, for this was Indian Story Land, the most prized, the most beautiful, the most prolific in fish and game in all the continent. Never had the red man clung with such tenacity to any section of his hunting grounds as did the Northern Sioux to this, the north and northeast watershed of the Big Horn Range. Old Indian fighters among the men shook their heads when the quartermaster selected a level bench as the site on which to begin the stockade that was to enclose the officers' quarters and the barracks, storehouse and magazine, and ominously they glanced at one another and then at the pine-skirted ridge that rose, sharp and sudden, against the sky, not four hundred yards away, dominating the site entirely.

"I shouldn't like the job of clearing away the gang of Indians that might seize that ridge," said Dean, when later asked by the engineer what he thought of it, and Dean had twice by that time been called upon to help "hustle" Indians out of threatening positions, and knew whereof he spoke.

"I shouldn't worry over things you're never likely to have to do," said the quartermaster, with sarcastic emphasis, and he was a man who never yet had had to face a foeman in the field, and Dean said

nothing more, but felt right well he had no friend in Major Burleigh.

They left the infantry there to guard the site and protect the gang of woodchoppers set to work at once, then turned their faces homeward. They had spent four days and nights at the Gap, and the more the youngster saw of the rotund quartermaster the less he cared to cultivate him. A portly, heavily built man was he, some forty years of age, a widower, whose children were at their mother's old home in the far East, a business man with a keen eye for opportunities and investments, a fellow who was reputed to have stock in a dozen mines and kindred enterprises, a knowing hand who drove fast horses and owned quite a stable, a sharp hand who played a thriving game of poker, and had no compunctions as to winning. Officers at Emory were fighting shy of him. He played too big a game for their small pay and pockets, and the men with whom he took his pleasure were big contractors or well-known "sports" and gamblers, who in those days thronged the frontier towns and most men did them homage. But on this trip Burleigh had no big gamblers along and missed his evening game, and, once arrived at camp along the Fork, he had "roped in" some of the infantry officers, but Brooks

and the engineer declined to play, and so had Dean from the very start.

"All true cavalrymen ought to be able to take a hand at poker," sneered Burleigh, at the first night's camp, for here was a pigeon really worth the plucking, thought he. Dean's life in the field had been so simple and inexpensive that he had saved much of his slender pay; but, what Burleigh did not know, he had sent much of it home to mother and Jess.

"I know several men who would have been the better for leaving it alone," responded Dean very quietly. They rubbed each other the wrong way from the very start, and this was bad for the boy, for in those days, when army morals were less looked after than they are now, men of Burleigh's stamp, with the means to entertain and the station to enable them to do it, had often the ear of officers from headquarters, and more things were told at such times to generals and colonels about their young men than the victims ever suspected. Burleigh was a man of position and influence, and knew it. Dean was a youngster without either, and did not realize it. He had made an enemy of the quartermaster on the trip and could not but know it. Yet, conscious that he had said nothing that was wrong, he felt no disquiet.

And now, homeward bound, he was jogging con-

tentedly along at the head of the troop. Scouts and flankers signaled "all clear." Not a hostile Indian had they seen since leaving the Gap. The ambulances with a little squad of troopers had hung on a few moments at the noon camp, hitching slowly and leisurely that their passengers might longer enjoy their post prandial siesta in the last shade they would see until they reached Cantonment Reno, a long day's ride away. Presently the lively mule teams would come along the winding trail at spanking trot. Then the troop would open out to right and left and let them take the lead, giving the dust in exchange, and once more the rapid march would begin.

It was four P. M. when the shadows of the mules' ears and heads came jerking into view beside him, and, guiding his horse to the right, Dean loosed rein and prepared to trot by the open doorway of the stout, black-covered wagon. The young engineer officer, sitting on the front seat, nodded cordially to the cavalryman. He had known and liked him at the Point. He had sympathized with him in the vague difference with the quartermaster. He had had to listen to sneering things Burleigh was telling the aide-de-camp about young linesmen in general and Dean in particular, stocking the staff officer with opinions which he hoped

and intended should reach the department commander's ears. The engineer disbelieved, but was in no position to disprove. His station was at Omaha, far from the scene of cavalry exploits in fort or field. Burleigh's office and depot were in this new, crowded, bustling frontier town, filled with temptation to men so far removed from the influences of home and civilization, and Burleigh doubtless saw and knew much to warrant his generalities. But he knew no wrong of Dean, for that young soldier, as has been said, had spent all but a few mid-winter months at hard, vigorous work in the field, had been to Gate City and Fort Emory only twice, and then under orders that called for prompt return to Frayne. Any man with an eye for human nature could see at a glance, as Dean saw, that both the aid and his big friend, the quartermaster, had been exchanging comments at the boy's expense. He had shouted a cheery salutation to the engineer in answer to his friendly nod, then turned in saddle and looked squarely at the two on the back seat, and the constraint in their manner, the almost sullen look in their faces, told the story without words.

It nettled Dean—frank, outspoken, straightforward as he had always been. He hated any species of backbiting, and he had heard of Burleigh as an

adept in the art, and a man to be feared. Signaling to his sergeant to keep the column opened out, as the prairie was almost level now on every side, he rode swiftly on, revolving in his mind how to meet and checkmate Burleigh's insidious moves, for instinctively he felt he was already at work. The general in command in those days was not a field soldier by any means. His office was far away at the banks of the Missouri, and all he knew of what was actually going on in his department he derived from official written reports; much that was neither official nor reliable he learned from officers of Burleigh's stamp, and Dean had never yet set eyes on him. In the engineer he felt he had a friend on whom he could rely, and he determined to seek his counsel at the campfire that very night, meantime to hold his peace.

They were trotting through a shallow depression at the moment, the two spring-wagons guarded and escorted by some thirty dusty, hardy-looking troopers. In the second, the yellow ambulance, Brooks was stretched at length, taking it easy, an attendant jogging alongside. Behind them came a third, a big quartermaster's wagon, drawn by six mules and loaded with tentage and rations. Out some three hundred yards to the right and left rode little squads as flankers. Out beyond them, further still,

often cut off from view by low waves of prairie, were individual troopers riding as lookouts, while far to the front, full six hundred yards, three or four others, spreading over the front on each side of the twisting trail, moved rapidly from crest to crest, always carefully scanning the country ahead before riding up to the summit. And now, as Dean's eyes turned from his charges to look along the sky line to the east, he saw sudden sign of excitement and commotion at the front. A sergeant, riding with two troopers midway between him and those foremost scouts, was eagerly signaling to him with his broad-brimmed hat. Three of the black dots along the gently rising slope far ahead had leaped from their mounts and were slowly crawling forward, while one of them, his horse turned adrift and contentedly nibbling at the buffalo grass, was surely signaling that there was mischief ahead.

In an instant the lieutenant was galloping out to the front, cautioning the driver to come on slowly. Presently he overhauled the sergeant and bade him follow, and together the four men darted on up the gradual incline until within ten yards of where the leaders' horses were placidly grazing. There they threw themselves from saddle; one of the men took the reins of the four horses while Dean and the other two, unslinging carbine and crouching low,

went hurriedly on up the slope until they came within a few yards of the nearest scout.

"Indians!" he called to them as soon as they were within earshot. "But they don't seem to be on lookout for us at all. They're fooling with some buffalo over here."

Crawling to the crest, leaving his hat behind, Dean peered over into the swale beyond and this was what he saw.

Half a mile away to the east the low, concave sweep of the prairie was cut by the jagged banks and curves of a watercourse which drained the melting snows in earlier spring. Along the further bank a dozen buffalo were placidly grazing, unconscious of the fact that in the shallow, dry ravine itself half a dozen young Indians—Sioux, apparently—were lurking, awaiting the nearer coming of the herd, whose leaders, at least, were gradually approaching the edge. Away down to the northeast, toward the distant Powder River, the shallow stream bed trended, and, following the pointing finger of the scout who crawled to his side, Dean gazed and saw a confused mass of slowly moving objects, betrayed for miles by the light cloud of dust that hovered over them, covering many an acre of the prairie, stretching far away down the vale. Even before he could unsling his field glass and

gaze, his plainscraft told him what was slowly, steadily approaching, as though to cross his front—an Indian village, a big one, on the move to the mountains, bound perhaps for the famous race-course of the Sioux, a grand amphitheater in the southern hills.

And even as they gazed, two tiny jets of flame and smoke shot from the ravine edge there below them, and before the dull reports could reach their ears the foremost bison dropped on his knees and then rolled over on the sod; and then came the order, at sound of which, back among the halted troopers, every carbine leaped from its socket.

CHAPTER III.

Down along the building railway in the valley of the Platte there had been two years of frequent encounter with small bands of Indians. Down along the Smoky Hill, in Kansas, the Cheyennes were ever giving trouble. Even around Laramie and Frayne, on the North Platte, settlers and soldiers had been murdered, as well as one or two officers, caught alone out hunting, and the Indians were, of course, the perpetrators. Nevertheless, it had been the policy of the leaders of the Northern Sioux to avoid any meeting in force and to deny the complicity of their people in the crimes committed. Supply trains to Reno, Kearney and C. F. Smith, the Big Horn posts of the Bozeman Trail, went to and fro with guards of only moderate size. Officers had taken their wives and children to these far-away stations. The stockades were filled with soldiers' families. Big bands of Indians roamed the lovely valleys of the Piney, the Tongue, and Rosebud, near at hand, and rode into full view of the wary sentries at the stockades, yet made no hostile

demonstration. Officers and men went far up the rocky cañons of the hills in search of fish or game, and came back unmolested. Escorts reported that they sometimes marched all day long side by side with hunting bands of Sioux, a mile away; and often little parties, squaws and boys and young men, would ride confidently over and beg for sugar, coffee, hardtack—anything, and ride off with their plunder in the best of spirits and with all apparent good feeling. And yet the great war-chief of the Brulês—Sintogaliska—Spotted Tail, the white man's friend, gave solemn warning not to trust the Ogallallas. "Red Cloud's heart is bad," he said. "He and his people are moving from the reservations to the mountains. They mean trouble." Old traders like Folsom heard and heeded, and Folsom himself hastened to Fort Frayne the very week that Burleigh and his escort left for Warrior Gap. Visiting at the ranch of his son in a beautiful nook behind the Medicine Bow Mountains, the veteran trader heard tidings from an Indian brave that filled him with apprehension, and he hurried to the fort.

"Is it true," he asked, "that the government means to establish a post at Warrior Gap? Is it true that Major Burleigh has gone thither?" And when told that it was and that only Captain

Brooks's troop had gone as escort, Folsom's agitation was extreme. "Colonel," said he, to the post commander, "solemnly I have tried to warn the general of the danger of that move. I have told him that all the northern tribes are leaguing now, that they have determined to keep to themselves the Big Horn country and the valleys to the north. It will take five thousand men to hold those three posts against the Sioux, and you've barely got five hundred. I warn you that any attempt to start another post up there will bring Red Cloud and all his people to the spot. Their scouts are watching like hawks even now. Iron Spear came to me at my son's ranch last night and told me not ten warriors were left at the reservation. They are all gone, and the war dances are on in every valley from the Black Hills to the Powder. For heaven's sake send half your garrison up to Reno after Brooks. You are safe here. They won't molest you south of the Platte, at least not now. All they ask is that you build no more forts in the Big Horn."

But the colonel could not act without authority. Telegraph there was none then. What Folsom said was of sufficient importance to warrant his hurrying off a courier to Laramie, fully one hundred miles southeast, and ordering a troop to scout across the wild wastes to the north, while Folsom

himself, unable to master his anxiety, decided to accompany the command sent out toward Cantonment Reno. He long had had influence with the Ogallallas. Even now Red Cloud might listen if he could but find him. The matter was of such urgency he could not refrain. And so with the gray troop of the cavalry, setting forth within an hour of his coming, rode the old trader whom the Indians had so long sworn by, and he started none too soon.

Reno was some ninety miles away, and not until late the next evening did the grays reach the lonely post. Not a sign of hostile Indian had been seen or heard, said the officer in command. Small bands of hunters were out toward Pumpkin Butte two days before.—Yes, Ogallallas—and a scouting party, working down the valley of the Powder, had met no band at all, though trails were numerous. They were now patroling toward the Big Horn. Perhaps there'd be a courier in to-morrow. Better get a good night's rest meantime, he said. But all the same he doubled his guards and ordered extra vigilance, for all men knew John Folsom, and when Folsom was anxious on the Indian question it was time to look alive. Daybreak came without a sign, but Folsom could not rest. The grays had no authority to go beyond Reno, but such was his

anxiety that it was decided to hold the troop at the cantonment for a day or two. Meantime, despite his years, Folsom decided to push on for the Gap. All efforts to dissuade him were in vain. With him rode Baptiste, a half-breed Frenchman whose mother was an Ogallalla squaw, and "Bat" had served him many a year. Their canteens were filled, their saddle-pouches packed. They led along an extra mule, with camp equipage, and shook hands gravely with the officers ere they rode away. "All depends," said Folsom, "on whether Red Cloud is hereabouts in person. If he is and I can get his ear I can probably stave off trouble long enough to get those people at the Gap back to Kearney, or over here. They're goners if they attempt to stay there and build that post. If you don't have word from us in two days, send for all the troops the government can raise. It will take every mother's son they've got to whip the Sioux when once they're leagued together."

"But our men have the new breech-loaders now, Mr. Folsom," said the officers. The Indians have only old percussion-cap rifles, and not too many of them."

"But there are twenty warriors to every soldier," was the answer, "and all are fighting men."

They watched the pair until they disappeared far

to the west. All day long the lookouts searched the horizon. All that night the sentries listened for hoofbeats on the Bozeman road, but only the weird chorus of the coyotes woke the echoes of the dark prairie. Dawn of the second day came, and, unable to bear suspense, the major sent a little party, mounted on their fleetest horses, to scour the prairies at least halfway to the foothills of the Big Horn, and just at nightfall they came back—three at least—galloping like mad, their mounts a mass of foam. Folsom's dread was well founded. Red Cloud, with heaven only knew how many warriors, had camped on Crazy Woman's Fork within the past three days, and gone on up stream. He might have met and fought the troops sent out three days before. He must have met the troops dispatched to Warrior Gap.

And this last, at least, he had done. For a few seconds after the fall of the buffalo bull, the watchers on the distant ridge lay still, except that Dean, turning slightly, called to the orderly trumpeter, who had come trotting out after the troop commander, and was now halted and afoot some twenty yards down the slope. "Go back, Bryan," he ordered. "Halt the ambulances. Notify Captain Brooks that there are lots of Indians ahead, and have the sergeant deploy the men at once." Then

he turned back and with his field glass studied the party along the ravine.

"They can't have seen us, can they, lieutenant?" muttered the trooper nearest him.

But Dean's young face was grave and clouded. Certainly the Indians acted as though they were totally unaware of the presence of troops, but the more he thought the more he knew that no big body of Sioux would be traveling across country at so critical a time (country, too, that was conquered as this was from their enemies, the Crows), without vigilant scouts afar out on front and flank. The more he thought the more he knew that even as early as three o'clock those keen-eyed fellows must have sighted his little column, conspicuous as it was because of its wagons. Beyond question, he told himself, the chief of the band or village so steadily approaching from the northeast had full information of their presence, and was coming confidently ahead. What had he to fear? Even though the blood of settlers and soldiers might still be red upon the hands of his braves, even though fresh scalps might be dangling at this moment from their shields, what mattered it? Did he not know that the safeguard of the Indian Bureau spread like the wing of a protecting angel over him and his people, forbidding troops to molest or open fire unless they themselves

were attacked? Did he not laugh in his ragged shirt sleeve at the policy of the white fool who would permit the red enemy to ride boldly up to his soldiers, count their numbers, inspect their array, satisfy himself as to their armament and readiness, then calculate the chances, and, if he thought the force too strong, ride on his way with only a significant gesture in parting insult? If, on the contrary, he found it weak then he could turn loose his braves, surround, massacre and scalp, and swear before the commissioners sent out to investigate next moon that he and his people knew nothing about the matter—nothing, at least, that they could be induced to tell.

One moment more Dean watched and waited. Two of the Indians in the ravine were busily reloading their rifles. Two others were aiming over the bank, for, with the strange stupidity of their kind, the other buffalo, even when startled by the shot, had never sought safety in flight, but were now sniffing the odor of blood on the tainted air, and slowly, wonderingly drawing near the stricken leader as though to ask what ailed him. Obedient and docile, the Indian ponies stood with drooping heads, hidden under the shelter of the steep banks. Nearer and nearer came the big black animals, bulky, stupid, fatuous; the foremost lowered a huge

head to sniff at the blood oozing from the shoulder of the dying bull, then two more shots puffed out from the ravine, the huge head tossed suddenly in air, and the ungainly brute started and staggered, whirled about and darted a few yards away, then plunged on its knees, and the next moment, startled at some sight the soldier watchers could not see, the black band was seized with sudden panic, and darted like mad into the depths of the watercourse, disappeared one moment from sight, then, suddenly reappearing, came laboring up the hither side, straight for the crest on which they lay, a dozen black, bounding, panting beasts thundering over the ground, followed by half a dozen darting Indian ponies, each with his lithe red rider scurrying in pursuit.

"Out of the way, men! Don't fire!" shouted Dean. And, scrambling back toward their horses, the lieutenant and his men drew away from the front of the charging herd, invisible as yet to the halted troop and to the occupants of the ambulance, whose eager heads could be seen poked out at the side doors of the leading vehicle, as though watching for the cause of the sudden halt.

And then a thing happened that at least one man saw and fortunately remembered later. Bryan, the trumpeter, with jabbing heels and flapping arms,

was tearing back toward the troop at the moment at the top speed of his gray charger, already so near that he was shouting to the sergeant in the lead. By this time, too, that veteran trooper, with the quick sense of duty that seemed to inspire the war-time sergeant, had jumped his little column "front into line" to meet the unseen danger; so that now, with carbines advanced, some thirty blue jackets were aligned in the loose fighting order of the prairies in front of the foremost wagon. The sight of the distant officer and men tumbling hurriedly back and to one side, out of the way presumably of some swiftly-coming peril, acted like magic on the line. Carbines were quickly brought to ready, the gun locks crackling in chorus as the horses pranced and snorted. But it had a varying effect on the occupants of the leading wagon. The shout of "Indians" from Bryan's lips, the sight of scurry on the ridge ahead brought the engineer and aide-de-camp springing out, rifle in hand, to take their manly part in the coming fray. It should have brought Major Burleigh too, but that appropriately named non-combatant never showed outside. An instant more and to the sound of rising thunder, before the astonished eyes of the cavalry line there burst into view, full tear for safety, the uncouth, yet marvelously swift-running leaders of

the little herd. The whole dozen came flying across the sky line and down the gentle slope, heading well around to the left of the line of troopers, while sticking to their flanks like red nettles half a dozen young warriors rode like the wind on their nimble ponies, cracking away with revolver or rifle in savage joy in the glorious sport. Too much for Burleigh's nerve was the combination of sounds, thunder of hoofs and sputter of shots, for when a cheer of sympathetic delight went up from the soldier line at sight of the chase, and the young engineer sprang to the door of the ambulance to help the major out, he found him a limp and ghastly heap, quivering with terror in the bottom of the wagon, looking for all the world as if he were trying to crawl under the seat.

CHAPTER IV.

AWAY to the left of the little command tore the quarry and the chase. Out on the rolling prairie, barely four hundred yards from where the ambulance and mules were backed into a tangle of traces and whiffletrees and fear-stricken creatures, another buffalo had dropped in a heap; a swarthy rider had tumbled off his pony, cut a slash or two with ever-ready knife, and then, throwing a bead-bedizened left leg over his eager little mount, had gone lashing away after his fellows, not without a jeering slap at the halted soldiery. Then, in almost less time than it takes to tell it, the pursued and pursuers had vanished from sight over a low ridge a mile to the north. "Only a hunting party!" said one or two nervous recruits, with a gulp of relief.' 'Only a hunting party," gasped Burleigh, as presently he heaved himself up from the floor, "and I thought I'd never find that damned gun of mine. All this fuss for nothing!" he continued, his lips still blue and quivering. "That green youngster up there in front hasn't learned the first principles of plains-

craft yet. Here, Brooks," he added loudly, "it's high time you were looking after this sub of yours," and Brooks, despite his illness, was indeed working out of the back door of his yellow trundle bed at the moment, and looking anxiously about. But the engineer stood pale and quiet, coolly studying the flustered growler, and when Burleigh's shifting eyes sought that young scientist's face, what he read there—and Burleigh was no fool—told him he would be wise to change the tune. The aid had pushed out in front of the troop and was signaling to Dean, once more in saddle and scanning through his glass the big band afar down the valley.

"Take my horse, sir," said the sergeant, dismounting, and the officer thanked him and rode swiftly out to join the young commander at the front. Together they gazed and consulted and still no signal came to resume the advance. Then the troopers saw the staff officer make a broad sweep with his right arm to the south, and in a moment Dean's hat was uplifted and waved well out in that direction. "Drop carbine," growled the sergeant. "By twos again. Incline to the right. Damn the Sioux, I say! Have we got to circle five miles around their hunting ground for fear of hurting their feelings. Come on, Jimmy," he added to

the driver of the leading wagon. Jimmy responded with vigorous language at the expense of his lead mules. The quartermaster and engineer silently scrambled in; the ambulance started with a jerk and away went the party off to the right of the trail, the wagons jolting a bit now over the uneven clumps of bunch grass.

But once well up at the summit of the low divide the command reined in for a look at the great Indian cavalcade swarming in the northeastward valley, and covering its grassy surface still a good mile away. Out from among the dingy mass came galloping half a dozen young braves, followed by as many squaws. The former soon spread out over the billowy surface, some following the direction of the chase, some bounding on southwestward as though confident of finding what they sought the moment they reached the nearest ridge; some riding straight to the point where lay the carcasses of the earliest victims of the hunt. Here in full view of the soldiery, but vouchsafing them no glance nor greeting whatever, two young warriors reined in their lively ponies and disdainfully turned their backs upon the spectators on the divide, while the squaws, with shrill laugh and chatter, rolled from their saddles and began the drudgery of their lot—

skinning and cutting up the buffalos slaughtered by their lords.

"Don't you see," sneered Burleigh, "it's nothing but a village out for a hunt—nothing in God's world to get stampeded about. We've had all this show of warlike preparation for nothing." But he turned away again as he caught the steady look in the engineer's blue eyes, and shouted to his more appreciative friend, the aide-de-camp: "Well, pardner, haven't we fooled away enough time here, or have we got to wait the pleasure of people that never saw Indians before?"

Dean flushed crimson at the taunt. He well knew for whom it was meant. He was indignant enough by this time to speak for himself, but the aide-de-camp saved him the trouble.

"I requested Mr. Dean to halt a few moments, Burleigh. It is necessary I should know what band this is, and how many are out."

"Well, be quick about it," snapped the quartermaster. "I want to get to Reno before midnight, and at this rate we won't make it in a week."

A sergeant who could speak a little Sioux came riding back to the camp, a grin on his sun-blistered face. "Well, sergeant, what'd he say?" asked the staff officer.

"He said would I plaze to go to hell, sorr," was the prompt response.

"Won't he tell who they are?"

"He won't, sorr. He says we know widout askin', which is thrue, sorr. They're Ogallallas to a man, barrin' the squaws and pappooses, wid ould Red Cloud himself."

"How'd you find out if they wouldn't talk?" asked the staff officer impatiently.

"'Twas the bucks wouldn't talk—except in swear wurruds. I wasted no time on them, sorr. I gave the first squaw the last hard-tack in me saddle-bags and tould her was it Machpealota, and she said it was, and he was wid Box Karesha—that's ould Folsom—not six hour ago, an' Folsom's gone back to the cantonment."

"Then the quicker we skip the better," were the aide-de-camp's words. "Get us to Reno fast as you can, Dean. Strike for the road again as soon as we're well beyond their buffalo. Now for it! There's something behind all this bogus hunt business, and Folsom knows what it is."

And every mile of the way, until thick darkness settled down over the prairie, there was something behind the trooper cavalcade—several somethings—wary red men, young and wiry, who never let themselves be seen, yet followed on over wave after

wave of prairie to look to it that no man went back from that column to carry the news of their presence to the little battalion left in charge of the new post at Warrior Gap.

It was the dark of the moon, or, as the Indians say, "the nights the moon is sleeping in his lodge," and by ten P. M. the skies were overcast. Only here and there a twinkling star was visible, and only where some trooper struck a light for his pipe could a hand be seen in front of the face. The ambulance mules that had kept their steady jog during the late afternoon and the long gloaming that followed still seemed able to maintain the gait, and even the big, lumbering wagon at the rear came briskly on under the tug of its triple span, but in the intense darkness the guides at the head of the column kept losing the road, and the bumping of the wagons would reveal the fact, and a halt would be ordered, men would dismount and go bending and crouching and feeling their way over the almost barren surface, hunting among the sage brush for the double furrow of the trail. Matches innumerable were consumed, and minutes of valuable time, and the quartermaster waxed fretful and impatient, and swore that his mules could find their way where the troopers couldn't, and finally, after the trail had been lost and found half a dozen times, old Brooks was badg-

ered into telling Dean to let the ambulance take the lead. The driver shirked at once.

"There's no tellin' where we'll fetch up," said he. "Those mules can't see the trail if a man can't. Take their harness off and turn 'em loose, an' I suppose they can find their way to the post, but sure as you turn them loose when they've got somethin' on 'em, or behind 'em, and the doggone cussedness of the creatures will prompt them to smash things."

But the quartermaster said he'd tried it with those very mules, between Emory and Medicine Bow a dozen times, and he'd risk it. The driver could get off his seat if he wanted to, and run alongside, but he'd stay where he was.

"Let me out, please," said the engineer, and jumped to the ground, and then the cavalcade pushed on again. The driver, as ordered by an employer whom he dare not disobey, let the reins drop on the mules' backs, the troopers falling behind, the yellow ambulance and the big baggage wagon bringing up the rear.

Then, with a horseman on each side, the mules were persuaded to push on again, and then when fairly started Burleigh called to the troopers to fall back, so that the mules should not, as he expressed it, "be influenced." "Leave them to themselves and they can get along all right," said he, "but mix

them up with the horses, and they want them to take all the responsibility."

And now the command was barely crawling. Brooks, heavy, languid with splitting headache, lay in feverish torpor in his ambulance, asking only to be let alone. The engineer, a subaltern as yet, felt that he had no right attempting to advise men like Burleigh, who proclaimed himself an old campaigner. The aide-de-camp was getting both sleepy and impatient, but he, too, was much the quartermaster's junior in rank. As for Dean, he had no volition whatever. "Escort the party," were his orders, and that meant that he must govern the movements of his horses and men by the wishes of the senior staff official. And so they jogged along perhaps twenty minutes more, and then there was a sudden splutter and plunge and stumble ahead, a sharp pull on the traces, a marvelously quick jerk back on the reins that threw the wheel team on their haunches, and thereby saved the "outfit," for when men and matches were hurried to the front the lead mules were discovered kicking and splashing in a mud hole. They were not only off the road by a dozen yards, but over a bank two feet high.

And this last pound broke the back of Burleigh's obstinacy. It was nearly midnight anyway. The

best thing to be done was unhitch, unsaddle and bivouac until the gray light of dawn came peering over the eastward prairie, which in that high latitude and "long-day" month would be soon after three. Then they could push on to Reno.

Not until nearly eight o'clock in the morning, therefore, did they heave in sight of the low belt of dingy green that told of the presence of a stream still long miles away; and here, knowing himself to be out of danger, the major bade the weary escort march in at a walk while he hurried on. In fifteen minutes the black-hooded wagon was twisting and turning over the powdery road a good mile ahead, its dust rising high over the sage-covered desert, while the other two, with the dust-begrimed troopers, jogged sturdily on. Loring, the young engineer, had waved a cordial good-by to his old cadet acquaintance. "See you later, old man," he cried. Stone, the aide-de-camp, nodded and said, "Take care of yourself," and Burleigh said nothing at all. He was wondering what he could do to muzzle Loring in case that gifted young graduate were moved to tell what the quartermaster actually did when he heard the rush and firing out at the front on the road from Warrior Gap.

But when at last the black wagon bowled in at the stockaded quadrangle and discharged its occu-

pants at the hut of the major commanding, there were tidings of such import to greet them that Burleigh turned yellow-white again at thought of the perils they had escaped.

"My God, man!" cried the post commander, as he came hurrying out to meet the party, "we've been in a blue funk about you fellows for two whole days. Did you see any Indians?"

"See any Indians!" said Burleigh, rallying to the occasion as became a man who knew how to grasp an opportunity. "We stood off the whole Sioux nation over toward Crazy Woman's Fork. There were enough to cover the country, red and black, for a dozen miles. We sighted them yesterday about four o'clock and there were enough around us to eat us alive, but we just threw out skirmish lines and marched steadily ahead, so they thought best not to bother us. They're shy of our breech loaders, damn 'em! That's all that kept them at respectful distance."

The major's face as he listened took on a puzzled, perturbed look. He did not wish to say anything that might reflect on the opinions of so influential a man as the depot quartermaster at Gate City, but it was plain that there was a train of thought rumbling through his mind that would collide with Burleigh's column of events unless he were spared

the need of answering questions. "Let me tell you briefly what's happened," he said. "Red Cloud and his whole band are out on the warpath. They killed two couriers, half-breeds, I sent out to find Thornton's troop that was scouting the Dry Fork. The man we sent to find you and give you warning hasn't got back at all. We've had double sentries for three days and nights. The only souls to get in from the northwest since our fellows were run back last night are old Folsom and Baptiste. Folsom had a talk with Red Cloud, and tried to induce him to turn back. He's beset with the idea that the old villain is plotting a general massacre along the Big Horn. He looks like a ghost. He says if we had five thousand soldiers up there there'd hardly be enough. You know the Sioux have sworn by him for years, and he thought he could coax Red Cloud to keep away, but all the old villain would promise was to hold his young men back ten days or so until Folsom could get the general to order the Warrior Gap plan abandoned. If the troops are there Folsom says it's all up with them. Red Cloud can rally all the Northern tribes, and it's only because of Folsom's influence, at least I fancy so—that—that they didn't attack you."

"Where is Folsom?" growled Burleigh, as he shook the powdery cloud from his linen duster and

followed the major within his darkened door, while other officers hospitably led the aid and engineer into the adjoining hut.

"Gone right on to Frayne. The old fellow will wear himself out, I'm afraid. He says he must get in telegraphic communication with Omaha before he's four days older. My heaven, man, it was a narrow squeak you had! It's God's mercy Folsom saw Red Cloud before he saw you."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the quartermaster, turning over a little packet of letters awaiting him in the commanding officer's sanctum. "We could have given a good account of ourselves, I reckon. Brooks is down with fever, and young Dean got rattled, or something like it. He's new at the business and easily scared, you know; so I practically had to take command. They'll be along in an hour or so, and—a word in your ear. If Brooks has to remain on sick report you'd better put somebody in command of that troop that's had—er—er—experience."

The post commander looked genuinely troubled. "Why, Burleigh, we've all taken quite a shine to Dean. I know the officers in his regiment think a heap of him; the seniors do, at least."

But Burleigh, with big eyes, was glaring at a letter he had selected, opened, and was hurriedly

reading. His face was yellowing again, under the blister of sun and alkali.

"What's amiss?" queried his friend. "Nothing wrong, I hope. Why, Burleigh, man! Here, let me help you!" he cried in alarm, for the quartermaster was sinking into a chair.

"You can help me!" he gasped. "Get me fresh mules and escort. My God! I must start for Frayne at once. Some whisky, please." And the letter dropped from his trembling hands and lay there unnoticed on the floor.

CHAPTER V.

Mid June had come, and there was the very devil to pay—so said the scouts and soldiers up along the Big Horn. But scouts and soldiers were far removed from the States and cities where news was manufactured, and those were days in which our Indian outbreaks were described in the press long after, instead of before, their occurrence. Such couriers as had got through to Frayne brought dispatches from the far-isolated posts along that beautiful range, insisting that the Sioux were swarming in every valley. Such dispatches, when wired to Washington and "referred" to the Department of the Interior and re-referred to the head of the Indian Bureau, were scoffed at as sensational.

"Our agents report the Indians peaceably assembled at their reservations. None are missing at the weekly distribution of supplies except those who are properly accounted for as out on their annual hunt." "The officers," said the papers, "seem to see red Indians in every bush," and unpleasant things were hinted at the officers as a consequence.

Indians there certainly were in other sections, and they were unquestionably "raising the devil" along the Smoky Hill and the Southern Plains, and there the Interior Department insisted that troops in strong force should be sent. So, too, along the line of the Union Pacific. Officials were still nervous. Troops of cavalry camped at intervals of forty miles along the line between Kearney and Julesburg, and even beyond. At Washington and the great cities of the East, therefore, there was no anxiety as to the possible fate of those little garrisons, with their helpless charge of women and children away up in the heart of the Sioux country. But at Laramie and Frayne and Emory, the nearest frontier posts; at Cheyenne, Omaha and Gate City the anxiety was great. When John Folsom said the Indians meant a war of extermination people west of the Missouri said: "Withdraw those garrisons while there is yet time or else send five thousand troops to help them." But people east of the Missouri said: "Who the devil is John Folsom? What does he know about it? Here's what the Indian agents say, and that's enough," and people east of the Missouri being vastly in the majority, neither were the garrisons relieved nor the reinforcements sent. What was worse, John Folsom's urgent advice that they discontinue at once all work at Warrior Gap and send

the troops and laborers back to Reno was pooh-poohed.

"The contracts have been let and signed. The material is all on its way. We can't back out now," said the officials. "Send runners to Red Cloud and get him in for a talk. Promise him lots of presents. Yes, if he must have them, tell him he shall have breech-loaders and copper cartridges, like the soldiers—to shoot buffalo with, of course. Promise him pretty much anything to be good and keep his hands off a little longer till we get that fort and the new agency buildings finished, and then let him do what he likes."

Such were the instructions given the commissioners and interpreters hurried through Gate City and Frayne, and on up to Reno just within the limit fixed by Folsom. Red Cloud and his chiefs came in accordingly, arrayed in pomp, paint and finery; shook hands grimly with the representatives of the Great Father, critically scanned the proffered gifts, disdainfully rejected the muzzle-loading rifles and old dragoon horse-pistols heaped before him. "Got heap better," was his comment, and nothing but brand new breech-loaders would serve his purpose. Promise them and he'd see what could be done to restrain his young men. But they were "pretty mad," he said, and couldn't be relied upon to keep the

peace unless sure of getting better arms and ammunition to help them break it next time. It was only temporizing. In was only encouraging the veteran war-chief in his visions of power and control. The commissioners came back beaming, "Everything satisfactorily arranged. Red Cloud and his people are only out for a big hunt." But officers whose wives and children prayed fearfully at night within the puny wooden stockades, and listened trembling to the howls and tom-toms of the dancing Indians around the council fires in the neighboring valleys, wished to heaven they had left those dear ones in safety at their Eastern homes—wished to heaven they could send them thither now, but well knew that it was too late. Only as single spies, riding by night, hiding by day, were couriers able to get through from the Big Horn to the Platte. Of scouts and soldiers sent at different times since the middle of May, seven were missing, and never, except through vague boastings of the Indians, were heard of again.

"It is a treacherous truce, I tell you," said Folsom, with grave, anxious face, to the colonel commanding Fort Emory. "I have known Red Cloud twenty years. He's only waiting a few weeks to see if the government will be fool enough to send them breech-loaders. If it does, he'll be all

the better able to fight a little later on. If it doesn't he will make it his *casus belli.*"

And the veteran colonel listened, looked grave, and said he had done his utmost to convince his superiors. He could do no more.

It was nearly three hundred miles by the winding mountain road from Gate City to Warrior Gap. Over hill and dale and mountain pass the road ran to Frayne, thence, fording the North Platte, the wagon trains, heavily guarded, had to drag over miles of dreary desert, over shadeless slopes and divides to the dry wash of the Powder, and by roads deep in alkali dust and sage brush to Cantonment Reno, where far to the west the grand range loomed up against the sky—another long day's march away to the nearest foothills, to the nearest drinkable water, and then, forty miles further still, in the heart of the grand pine-covered heights, was the rock-bound gateway to a lovely park region within, called by the Sioux some wild combination of almost unpronounceable syllables, which, freely translated, gave us Warrior Gap, and there at last accounts, strengthened by detachments from Frayne and Reno, the little command of fort builders worked away, ax in hand, rifle at hand, subjected every hour to alarm from the vedettes and pickets posted thickly all about them, pickets who were sometimes

found stone dead at their posts, transfixed with arrows, scalped and mutilated, and yet not once had Indians in any force been seen by officers or man about the spot since the day Red Cloud's whole array passed Brooks's troop on the Reno trail, peaceably hunting buffalo. "An' divil a sowl in in the outfit," said old Sergeant Shaughnessy, "that hadn't his tongue in his cheek."

For three months that hard-worked troop had been afield, and the time had passed and gone when its young first lieutenant had hoped for a leave to go home and see the mother and Jess. His captain was still ailing and unfit for duty in saddle. He could not and would not ask for leave at such a time, and yet at the very moment when he was most earnestly and faithfully doing his whole duty at the front, slander was busy with his name long miles at the rear.

Something was amiss with Burleigh, said his cronies at Gate City. He had come hurrying back from the hills, had spent a day in his office and not a cent at the club, had taken the night express unbeknown to anybody but his chief clerk, and gone hurrying eastward. It was a time when his services were needed at the depot, too. Supplies, stores, all manner of material were being freighted from Gate City over the range to the Platte and

beyond, yet he had wired for authority to hasten to Chicago on urgent personal affairs, got it and disappeared. A young regimental quartermaster was ordered in from Emory to take charge of shipments and sign invoices during Burleigh's temporary absence, and the only other officer whom Burleigh had seen and talked with before his start was the venerable post commander. One after another the few cavalry troops (companies) on duty at Emory had been sent afield until now only one was left, and three days after Burleigh started there came a dispatch from department headquarters directing the sending of that one to Frayne at once. Captain Brooks's troop, owing to the continued illness of its commander, would be temporarily withdrawn and sent back to Emory to replace it.

Marshall Dean did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Soldier from top to toe, he was keenly enjoying the command of his troop. He gloried in mountain scouting, and was in his element when astride a spirited horse. Then, too, the air was throbbing with rumors of Indian depredations along the northward trails, and everything pointed to serious outbreak any moment, and when it came he longed to be on hand to take his share and win his name, for with such a troop his chances were better for honors and distinctions than those of any

youngster he knew. Therefore he longed to keep afield. On the other hand the visit paid by Jessie's school friend, little "Pappoose" Folsom, was to be returned in kind. John Folsom had begged and their mother had consented that after a week at home Jess should accompany her beloved friend on a visit to her far western home. They would be escorted as far as Omaha, and there Folsom himself would meet them. His handsome house was ready, and, so said friends who had been invited to the housewarming, particularly well stocked as to larder and cellar. There was just one thing on which Gate City gossips were enabled to dilate that was not entirely satisfactory to Folsom's friends, and that was the new presiding goddess of the establishment.

"What on earth does John Folsom want of a housekeeper?" asked the helpmates of his friends at Fort Emory, and in the bustling, busy town. "Why don't he marry again?" queried those who would gladly have seen some unprovided sister, niece or daughter thus cozily disposed of. It was years since Elinor's mother's death, and yet John Folsom seemed to mourn her as fondly as ever, and except in midwinter, barely a month went by in which he did not make his pilgrimage to her never-neglected grave. Yet, despite his vigorous years

in saddle, sunshine or storm, and his thorough love for outdoor life, Folsom, now well over fifty, could no longer so lightly bear the hard life of the field. He was amazed to see how his sleepless dash to head off Red Cloud, and his days and nights of gallop back, had told upon him. Women at Fort Emory who looked with approving eyes on his ruddy face and trim, erect figure, all so eloquent of health, and who possibly contemplated, too, his solid bank account, and that fast-building house, the finest in Gate City, had been telling him all winter long he ought to have a companion—an elder guide for Miss Elinor on her return; he ought to have some one to preside at his table; and honest John had promptly answered: "Why, Nell will do all that," which necessitated their hinting that although Miss Folsom would be a young lady in years, she was only a child in experience, and would be much the better for some one who could take a mother's place. "No one could do that," said John, with sudden swimming of his eyes, and that put as sudden a stop to their schemings, for the time at least, but only for the time. Taking counsel together, and thinking how lovely it would be now if Mr. Folsom would only see how much there was in this unmarried damsel, or that widowed dame, the coterie at Emory again returned to the subject,

until John, in his perplexity, got the idea that propriety demanded that he should have a housekeeper against his daughter's coming, and then he did go and do, in his masculine stupidity, just exactly what they couldn't have had him do for worlds—invite a woman, of whom none of their number had ever heard, to come from Omaha and take the domestic management of his hearth and home. All he knew of her was what he heard there. She was the widow of a volunteer officer who had died of disease contracted during the war. She was childless, almost destitute, accomplished, and *so* devoted to her church duties. She was interesting and refined, and highly educated. He heard the eulogiums pronounced by the good priest and some of his flock, and Mrs. Fletcher, a substantial person of some forty years at least, was duly installed.

Fort Emory was filled with women folk and consternation—most of the men being afield. The seething question of the hour was whether they should call on her, whether she was to be received at the fort, whether she was to be acknowledged and recognized at all, and then came, *mirabile dictu*, a great government official from Washington to inspect the Union Pacific and make speeches at various points along the road, and Mrs. Fletcher, mind you, walked to church the very next Sunday

on the Honorable Secretary's arm, sat by his side when he drove out to hear the band at Emory, and received with him on the colonel's veranda, and that settled it. Received and acknowledged and visited she had to be. She might well prove a woman worth knowing.

Within a fortnight she had made the new homestead blossom like the rose. Within a month everything was in perfect order for the reception of Elinor and her school friend—a busy, anxious month, in which Folsom was flitting to and fro to Reno and Frayne, as we have seen; to Hal's ranch in the Medicine Bow, to Rawhide and Laramie, and the reservations in Northwestern Nebraska; and it so happened that he was away the night Major Burleigh, on his way to the depot, dropped in to inquire if he could see Mr. Folsom a moment on important business. The servant said he was not in town—had gone, she thought, to Omaha. She would inquire of Mrs. Fletcher, and meantime would the major step inside? Step inside, and stand wonderingly at the threshold of the pretty parlor he did; and then there was a rustle of silken skirts on the floor above, and, as he turned to listen, his haggard, careworn face took on a look something like that which overspread it the night he got the letter at Reno—something that told of bewilderment and

perplexity as a quiet, modulated voice told the servant to tell the gentleman Mr. Folsom might not return for several days. Burleigh had no excuse to linger, none to ask to hear that voice again; yet as he slowly descended the steps its accents were still strangely ringing in his ears. Where on earth had he heard that voice before?

CHAPTER VI.

THE quartermaster's depot at Gate City was little more than a big corral, with a double row of low, wooden sheds for the storing of clothing, camp and garrison equipage. There was a blacksmith and wagon repair shop, and a brick office building. Some cottage quarters for the officer in charge and his clerks, corral master, etc., stood close at hand, while most of the employees lived in town outside the gates. A single-track spur connected the depot with the main line of the Union Pacific only five hundred yards away, and the command at Fort Emory, on the bluff above the rapid stream, furnished, much to its disgust, the necessary guard. A much bigger "plant" was in contemplation near a larger post and town on the east side of the great divide, and neither Fort Emory nor its charge—the quartermaster's depot—was considered worth keeping in repair, except such as could be accomplished "by the labor of troops," which was why, when he wasn't fighting Indians, the frontier soldier of that

day was mainly occupied in doing the odd jobs of a day laborer, without the recompense of one, or his privilege of quitting if he didn't like the job. That he should know little of drill and less of parade was, therefore, not to be wondered at.

But what he didn't know about guard duty was hardly worth knowing. He had prisoners and property of every conceivable kind—Indians, horse thieves, thugs and deserters, magazines and medicines, mules and munitions of war. Everything had to be guarded. The fort lay a mile to the west of and two hundred feet higher than the railway hotel in the heart of the town. It looked down upon the self-styled city, and most of its womenkind did the same on the citizens, who were, it must be owned, a rather mixed lot. The sudden discovery of gold in the neighboring foothills, the fact that it promised to be the site of the division car shops and roundhouse, that the trails to the Upper Platte, the Sweetwater, the Park country to the south, and the rich game regions of the Medicine Bow all centered there, and that stages left no less than twice a week for some of those points, and the whole land was alive with explorers for a hundred miles around—all had tended to give Gate City a remarkable boom. Cheyenne and Laramie, thriving frontier towns with coroners' offices in full blast from one

week's end to the other, and a double force on duty Sundays, confessed to and exhibited pardonable jealousy. Yet there was wisdom in the warning of an old friend and fellow frontiersman, who said to Folsom, "You are throwing yourself and your money away, John. There's nothing in those gold stories, there's nothing in that yawp about the machine shops; all those yarns were started by U. P. fellows with corner lots to sell. The bottom will drop out of that place inside of a year and leave you stranded."

All the same had Folsom bought big blocks and built his home there. It was the nearest town of promise to Hal Folsom's wild but beautiful home in the hills, and, almost as he loved Nell, his bonny daughter, did the old trader love his stalwart son. Born a wild Westerner, reared among the Sioux with only Indians or army boys for playmates, and precious little choice in point of savagery between them, Hal had grown up a natural horseman with a love for and knowledge of the animal that is accorded to few. His ambition in life was to own a stock farm. All the education he had in the world he owed to the kindness of loving-hearted army women at Laramie, women who befriended him when well-nigh broken-hearted by his mother's death. Early he had pitched his tent on the very

spot for a ranchman's homestead, early he had fallen in love with an army girl, who married the strapping frontiersman and was now the proud mistress of the new and promising stock farm nestling in the valley of the Laramie, a devoted wife and mother. The weekly stage to the railway was the event of their placid days except when some of the officers and ladies would come from either of the neighboring posts and spend a week with her and Hal. From being a delicate, consumptive child, Mrs. Hal had developed into a buxom woman with exuberant health and spirits. Life to her might have some little monotony, but few cares; many placid joys, but only one great dread—Indians. John Folsom, her fond father-in-law, was a man all Indians trusted and most of them loved. Hal Folsom, her husband, had many a trusted and devoted friend among the Sioux, but he had also enemies, and Indian enmity, like Indian love, dies hard. As boy he had sometimes triumphed in games and sports over the champions of the villages. As youth he had more than once found favor in the dark eyes that looked coldly on fiercer, fonder claimants, and one girl of the Ogallallas had turned from her kith and kin, spurned more than one red lover to seek the young trader when he left the reservation to build his own nest in the Medicine

Bow, and they told a story as pathetic as that of the favorite daughter of old Sintogaliska, chief of the Brulé Sioux, who pined and died at Laramie when she heard that the soldier she loved had come back from the far East with a pale-faced bride. There were red men of the Ogallallas to whom the name of Hal Folsom was a taunt and insult to this day, men whom his father had vainly sought to appease, and they were Burning Star, the lover, and two younger braves, the brothers of the girl they swore that Hal had lured away.

South of the Platte, as it rolled past Frayne and Laramie, those Indians were bound by treaty not to go. North of the Platte Hal Folsom was warned never again to venture. These were stories which were well known to the parents of the girl he wooed and won, but which probably were not fully explained to her. Now, even behind the curtain of that sheltering river, with its flanking forts, even behind the barrier of the mountains of the Medicine Bow, she often woke at night and clutched her baby to her breast when the yelping of the coyotes came rising on the wind. There was no woman in Wyoming to whom war with Red Cloud's people bore such dread possibility as to Hal Folsom's wife.

And so when Marshall Dean came riding in one

glad June morning, bronzed, and tanned, and buoyant, and tossed his reins to the orderly who trotted at his heels, while the troop dismounted and watered at the stream, Mrs. Folsom's heart was gladdened by his confident and joyous bearing. Twice, thrice he had seen Red Cloud and all his braves, and there was nothing, said he, to worry about. "Ugly, of course they are; got some imaginary grievances and talk big about the warpath. Why, what show would those fellows have with their old squirrel rifles and gas-pipe Springfields against our new breech-loaders? They know it as well as we do. It's all a bluff, Mrs. Folsom. You mark my words," said he, and really the boy believed it. Frequent contact in the field with the red warriors inspires one with little respect for their skill or prowess until that contact becomes hostile, then it's time to keep every sense on guard and leave no point uncovered.

"But what if the Indian Bureau should let them have breech-loaders?" she anxiously asked. "You know that is Red Cloud's demand."

"Oh," said Dean, with confidence born of inexperience in the Bureau ways, "they couldn't be such fools. Besides, if they do," he added hopefully, "you'll see my troop come trotting back full tilt. Now, I'm counting on a good time at Emory, and

on bringing your sister and mine up here to see you."

"It will be just lovely," said Mrs. Hal, with a woman's natural but unspoken comparison between the simplicity of her ranch toilet and the probable elegancies of the young ladies' Eastern costumes. "They'll find us very primitive up here in the mountains, I'm afraid; but if they like scenery and horseback riding and fishing there's nothing like it."

"Oh, they're coming sure. Jessie's letters tell me that's one of the big treats Mr. Folsom has promised them. Just think, they should be along this week, and I shall be stationed so near them at Emory—of all places in the world."

"How long is it since you have seen Elinor—'Pappoose,' as your sister calls her," asked Mrs. Hal, following the train of womanly thought then drifting through her head, as she set before her visitor a brimming goblet of buttermilk.

"Two years. She was at the Point a day or two the summer of our graduation," he answered carelessly. "A real little Indian girl she was, too, so dark and shy and silent, yet I heard Professor M——'s daughters and others speak of her later; she pleased them so much, and Jessie thinks there's no girl like her."

"And you haven't seen her since—not even her

picture?" asked Mrs. Hal, rising from her easy-chair. "Just let me show you the one she sent Hal last week. I think there's a surprise in store for you, young man," was her mental addition, as she tripped within doors.

The nurse girl, a half-breed, one of the numerous progeny of the French trappers and explorers who had married among the Sioux, was hushing the burly little son and heir to sleep in his Indian cradle, crooning some song about the fireflies and and Heecha, the big-eyed owl, and the mother stooped to press her lips upon the rounded cheek and to flick away a tear-drop, for Hal 2d had roared lustily when ordered to his noonday nap. Away to the northward the heavily wooded heights seemed tipped by fleecy, summer clouds, and off to the northeast Laramie Peak thrust his dense crop of pine and scrub oak above the mass of snowy vapor that floated lazily across that grim-visaged southward scarp. The drowsy hum of insects, the plash of cool, running waters fell softly on the ear. Under the shade of willow and cottonwood cattle and horses were lazily switching at the swarm of gnats and flies or dozing through the heated hours of the day. Out on the level flat beyond the corral the troopers had unsaddled, and the chargers, many of them stopping to roll in equine ecstasy upon the

turf, were being driven out in one big herd to graze. Without and within the ranch everything seemed to speak of peace and security. The master rode the range long miles away in search of straying cattle, leaving his loved ones without thought of danger. The solemn treaty that bound the Sioux to keep to the north of the Platte stood sole sentinel over his vine and fig tree. True there had been one or two instances of depredation, but they could be fastened on no particular band, and all the chiefs, even defiant Red Cloud, and insolent, swaggering Little Big Man, denied all knowledge of the perpetrators. Spotted Tail, it was known, would severely punish any of his people who transgressed, but he could do nothing with the Ogallallas. Now they were not two hundred miles away to the north, their ranks swollen by accessions from all the disaffected villages and turbulent young braves of the swarming bands along the Missouri and Yellowstone, and if their demands were resisted by the government, or worse, if they were permitted to have breech-loaders or magazine rifles, then just coming into use, no shadow of doubt remained that war to the knife would follow. Then how long would it be before they came charging down across the Platte, east or west of Frayne, and raiding those new ranches in the Laramie Valley?

Reassuring as he meant his words to be, Marshall Dean himself looked anxiously about at the unprotected walls. Not even the customary "dugout" or underground refuge seemed to have been prepared. Almost every homestead, big or little, of those days, had its tunnel from the cellar to a dugout near at hand, stocked with provisions and water and provided with loopholes commanding the neighborhood, and herein the besieged could take refuge and stand off the Indians until help should come from the nearest frontier fort. "The name of Folsom is our safeguard," said Mrs. Hal, in her happy honeymoon days, but that was before the mother told her of the threats of Burning Star or the story of the Ogallalla girl he vainly loved. "All that happened so long ago," she murmured, when at last the tale was told. But Hal should have known, if she did not, that, even when it seems to sleep, Indian vengeance is but gaining force and fury.

Presently Mrs. Hall came tripping forth again, a little *carte de visite* in her hand, a smile of no little significance on her lips. "Now, Mr. Dean, will you tell me what you think of that for a pappoose?"

And with wonderment in his eyes the young officer stood and held it and gazed.

There stood Pappoose, to be sure, but what a change! The little maiden with the dark braids of

hair hanging far below her waist had developed into a tall, slender girl, with clear-cut, oval face, crowned by a mass of dark tresses. Her heavy, low-arching brows spanned the thoughtful, deep, dark-brown eyes that seemed to speak the soul within, and the beautiful face was lighted up with a smile that showed just a peep of faultless white teeth, gleaming through the warm curves of her soft, sensitive lips. The form was exquisitely rounded, yet supple and erect.

"Hasn't Jessie written you of how Nell has grown and improved?" said Mrs. Hall, with a woman's quick note of the admiration and surprise in Dean's regard.

"She must have," was the answer, "I'm sure she has, but perhaps I thought it schoolgirl rhapsody —perhaps I had too many other things to think of."

"Perhaps you'll find it superseding these too many things, Mr. Soldier Boy," was Mrs. Hal's mental comment. "Now, sir, if you've gazed enough perhaps you'll tell me your plans," and she stretched forth a reclaiming hand.

But he hung on to the prize. "Let me keep it a minute," he pleaded. "It's the loveliest thing I've seen in months."

And, studying his absorbed face, she yielded, her eyebrows arching, a pretty smile of feminine

triumph about her lips, and neither noticed the non-commissioned officer hurrying within the gate, nor that half the men in "C" Troop at their bivouac along the stream were on their feet and gazing to northeast, that far down the valley a horseman was speeding like the wind, that little puffs of smoke were rising from the crests of the grand landmark of the range and floating into the blue of the heavens. Both started to their feet at the abrupt announcement.

"Lieutenant, there are smoke signals on Lar'mie Peak."

CHAPTER VII.

LIEUTENANT DEAN'S orders required that he should march his troop without unnecessary delay to Fort Emory, there to take station relieving Troop "F," ordered to change to Frayne, which meant, in so many words, to take the field. Captain Brooks, still wrestling with the fever, had retired to his quarters at the old frontier fort that stood so long on the bluffs overlooking the fords of the Platte. The surgeon said he must remain in bed at least a week, so meantime the troop packed up, sent its wagons ahead over the range, bade God speed to "F" as it passed through *en route* to the front, exchanged a volley of chaff and chewing tobacco over the parting game of "freeze out" fought to a finish on many an outspread saddle blanket, then, jogged on toward Gate City, making wide *détour* at the suggestion of the field officer in command at Frayne, that they might scout the Laramie plains and see that all was well at Folsom's ranch. This *détour* was duly reported to the peppery

veteran at Fort Emory, an old colonel whose command was by this time reduced from "headquarters, field, staff and band," six companies of infantry and four troops of cavalry, to the band and two desperately overworked companies of foot. "Two nights in bed" were all his men could hope for, and sometimes no more than one, so grievous was the guard duty. Hence "old Pecksniff," his adjutant and quartermaster and his two remaining companies saw fit to take it as most unkind in Lieutenant-Colonel Ford to authorize that diversion of Dean's, and highly improper on Dean's part to attempt it. By this time, too, there was in circulation at Emory a story that this transfer of "C" to interior lines and away from probable contact with the Sioux was not so much that it had done far more than its share of that arduous work, completely using up its captain, as that, now the captain was used up, the authorities had their doubts as to the "nerve" of the lieutenant in temporary command. A fellow who didn't care to come to Emory and preferred rough duty up along the Platte must be lacking in some essential particular, thought the women folk, and at the very moment that Marshall Dean sat there at Hal Folsom's ranch, as brave and hardy and capable a young officer as ever forded the Platte, looking forward with

pleasurable anticipations to those days to come at Emory, with Jessie—Jessie and, of course, Pappoose—so close at hand in town, there was gaining ground at the post an impression that the safety of the board of officers sent to choose the site of the new Big Horn post had been imperiled by Dean's weakening at a critical moment in presence of a band of probably hostile Sioux. Burleigh had plainly intimated as much to his chief clerk and Colonel Stevens, and when Loring and Stone came through a day or two later and questions were asked about that meeting, the aide-de-camp gave it as distinctly to be understood that he had practically assumed command, Dean's inexperience being manifest, and his own prompt measures had extricated the little detachment from a most delicate and dangerous position. The engineer, let it be said, did not hear this statement, and the aid was very careful not to make it in his presence. He was a comparative stranger and as no one presumed to question him, he volunteered no information.

Planning to bivouac until dawn of the next day at Folsom's, Dean had then intended to reach Fort Emory in three easy marches. He was anxious to bring his horses in in best possible condition, despite all their hard service; yet now, barely two o'clock on this hot June afternoon, came most unlooked-for,

most importunate interruption to his plans. Springing to the gate at the sergeant's summons, he first directed his gaze to the distant peak, recognized instantly the nature of the smoke puffs there rising, then turned for explanation to the swift-riding courier, whose horse's heels were making the dust fly from the sun-dried soil. One or two ranch hands, with anxious faces, came hastening over from the corral. The darkey cook rushed up from the kitchen, rifle in hand. Plainly these fellows were well used to war's alarms. Mrs. Folsom, with staring eyes and dreadful anxiety in her face, gazed only at the hurrying courier, clinging the while to the pillar of the portico, as though needing support. The smoke puffs on the mountain, the dust-cloud back of the tearing rider were symptoms enough for Dean.

"Get in your herd, sergeant!" he shouted at the top of his voice; and over the rushing of the Laramie his words reached the rousing bivouac, and saddle blankets were sent swinging in air in signal to the distant guards, and within a few seconds every horse was headed for home; and then, to the sound of excited voices was added the rising thunder of scores of bounding hoofs, as, all in a dust-cloud of their own, the sixty chargers came galloping in, ears erect, eyes ablaze, nostrils wide, manes and

tails streaming in the breeze, guided by their eager guards full tilt for camp. Out ran their riders, bridles in hand, to meet and check them, every horse when within a few yards of his master seeming to settle on his haunches and plow up the turf in the sudden effort to check his speed, long months of service on the plains and in the heart of Indian land having taught them in times of alarm or peril that the quicker they reached the guiding hand and bore, each, his soldier on his back, the quicker would vanish the common foe. Even before the panting steed of the headlong courier came within hailing distance of the ranch, half the horses in the troop were caught and the bits were rattling between their teeth; then, as the messenger tore along the gentle slope that led to the gateway, his wearied horse laboring painfully at the rise, Mrs. Folsom recognized one of her husband's herdsmen, a man who had lived long years in Wyoming and could be unnerved by no false alarm, and her voice went up in a shriek of fear as she read the tidings in his almost ghastly face.

"Where is Hal?" she screamed. "Oh, what has happened?"

"He's safe," was the answering call, as the rider waved a reassuring hand, but at the instant he bent low. "Thank God, you're here, lieutenant," he

gasped. "Mount quick. Hal's corralled two miles out there under the butte—Sioux!" And then they saw that he was swooning, that the blood was streaming down the left thigh and leg, and before hand could help him, he rolled senseless, doubled up in the dust at his horse's feet, and the weary creature never even started.

"Saddle up, men!" rang the order across the stream. And then while strong arms lifted and bore the wounded herdsman to the porch, Dean turned to the wailing mistress, who, white-faced and terror-stricken, was wringing her hands and moaning and running wildly up and down the walk and calling for some one to go and save her husband. Dean almost bore her to a chair and bade her fear nothing. He and his men would lose not a moment. On the floor at her feet lay the little card photograph, and Dean, hardly thinking what he did, stooped, picked it up and placed it in the pocket of his hunting shirt, just as the trumpeter on his plunging gray reached the gate, Dean's big, handsome charger trotting swiftly alongside. In an instant the lieutenant was in saddle, in another second a trooper galloped up with his belt and carbine. Already the men were leading into line across the stream, and, bidding the trumpeter tell Sergeant Shaughnessy to follow at speed, the young

officer struck spur to his horse and, carbine in hand, a single trooper at his heels, away he darted down the valley. "C" Troop, splashing through the ford a moment later, took the direct road past the stockade of the corral, disappeared from sight a moment behind that wooden fortification, and, when next it hove in view, it was galloping front into line far down the Laramie, then once more vanished behind its curtain of dust.

"Two miles out there under the butte," was the only indication the young officer had of the scene of the fight, for fight he knew it must be, and even as he went bounding down the valley he recalled the story of the Indian girl, the threats of Burning Star, the vowed vengeance of her brothers. Could it be that, taking advantage of this raid of Red Cloud, far from all the reservations, far from possibility of detection by count of prying agents, the three had induced a gang of daring, devil-may-care young warriors to slip away from the Big Horn with them and, riding stealthily away from the beaten trails, to ford the Platte beyond the ken of watchful eyes at Frayne and sneak through the mountain range to the beautiful, fertile valley beyond, and there lie in wait for Hal Folsom or for those he loved? What was to prevent? Well they knew the exact location of his ranch. They had

fished and sported all about it in boy days—days when the soldiers and the Sioux were all good friends, days before the mistaken policy of a post commander had led to an attack upon a peaceful band, and that to the annihilation of the attacking party. From that fatal day of the Grattan massacre ten years before, there had been no real truce with the Sioux, and now was opportunity afforded for a long-plotted revenge. Dean wondered Folsom had not looked for it instead of sleeping in fancied security.

A mile nearer the butte and, glancing back, he could see his faithful men come bounding in his tracks. A mile ahead, rising abruptly from the general level, a little knoll or butte jutted out beyond the shoulders of the foothills and stood sentinel within three hundred yards of the stream. On the near—the westward—side, nothing could be seen of horse or man. Something told him he would find the combatants beyond—that dead or alive, Hal Folsom would be there awaiting him. A glance at the commanding height and the ridge that connected it with the tumbling, wooded hills to the north, convinced him that at this moment some of the foe were lurking there, watching the westward valley, and by this time they knew full well of the coming of the cavalry to the rescue.

By this time, more than likely, they were scurrying off to the mountains again, returning the way they came, with a start of at least two miles.

"With or without the coveted scalps?" he wondered. Thus far he had been riding straight for the butte. The road wound along and disappeared behind him, but there was no sense in following the road. "Pursue and punish," was the thing to be done. Surely not more than a dozen were in the band, else that courier could never have hoped to get in, wounded as he was. The Indians were too few in number to dare follow to the ranch, guarded as, by almost God-given luck, it happened to be through the unlooked-for presence of the troops. No, it was a small band, though a daring one. Its lookout had surely warned it by this time of his coming, and by this time, too, all save one or two who rode the fleetest ponies and lingered probably for a parting shot at the foremost of the chase, had scampered away behind the curtain of that ridge. Therefore, in long curve, never checking his magnificent stride, Dean guided his bounding bay to the left—the northeast—and headed for the lowest point of the divide.

And then it all occurred to him too that he was far in front of his men, too far to be of use to them and just far enough to be an easy prey for the lurk-

ing foe. Then, too, it occurred to him that he must not leave the ranch unprotected. Already he was within long rifle range of the height; already probably some beady eye was glancing through the sights, and the deadly tube was covering him as he came bounding on. Three hundred yards more and his life probably wouldn't be worth a dollar in Confederate money, and wisely the young leader began to draw rein, and, turning in saddle, signaled to his single companion, laboring along one hundred yards behind, to hasten to join him. Presently the trooper came spurring up, a swarthy young German, but though straining every nerve the troop was still a mile away.

"Ride back, Wegner, and tell the sergeant to take ten men around that side—the south side of the bluff," and he pointed with his hand; "the rest to come straight to me."

Oh, well was it for Dean that he checked his speed, and as the young dragoon went sputtering back, that he himself drew rein and waited for the coming of his men. Suddenly from far out along the ridge in front, from the very crest there leaped a jet or two of fire and smoke. Two little spurts of dust and turf flew up from the prairie sod a dozen yards in front, a rifle bullet went singing off through the sunny air, Rabb, his handsome bay, pawed the

ground and switched about, and up on the crest, riding boldly in full view, two lithe, naked, painted warriors, war bonnets trailing over their ponies' croups, yelling shrill insult and derision, went tearing away northward, one of them pausing long enough to wave some ragged object on high, and give one ringing, exultant whoop ere he disappeared from view.

"It's a scalp, lieutenant," shouted the foremost sergeant as he came lunging up to join his chief. "They've got one, anyhow."

"Come on, then, and we'll get it back," was the only answer, as with nearly thirty troopers stringing out behind them, the two launched out in chase.

CHAPTER VIII.

Obedient to his orders the Irish sergeant, with a little squad at his heels, had kept straight on. A few minutes later, rounding the bluff at the gallop, eyes flashing over the field in front of them, the party went racing out over the turf and came in full view of the scene of the fight. Five hundred yards further down stream was a deep bend in the Laramie. Close to the water's edge two horses lay stretched upon the ground, stone dead. Out on the open prairie lay an Indian pony still kicking in his dying agony, and as the soldiers came sweeping into view two men rose up from behind the low bank of the stream and swung their hats—Hal Folsom and one of his hands safe, unwounded, yet with a look in their gray faces that told of recent mortal peril.

"We're all right! Go on after them. They've run off a dozen of my best horses," said Folsom, "and I'm afraid they cut off Jake."

"No! Jake reached the ranch all right—leastwise somebody did," said Shaughnessy. "That's how

we got the news. They got somebody, or else they were only bluffing when they waved that scalp. How many were there?"

"At least a dozen—too many for you to tackle. Where's the rest of the troop?"

"Close at their heels. The lieutenant led them right over the ridge. Listen!"

Yes, far up in the foothills, faint and clear, the sounds of the chase could now be heard. Dean's men were closing on the fleeing warriors, for every little while the silence of the range was broken by the crack of rifle or carbine. Shaughnessy's fellows began to fidget and look eagerly thither, and he read their wish. "Two of you stay with Mr. Folsom," he said, "and the rest come with me. There's nothing we can do here, is there? Sure, you're not hit?"

"No, go on! Give 'em hell and get back my horses. I'd go with you, but they've killed what horses they couldn't drive. All safe at the ranch?"

Shaughnessy nodded as he spurred away. "We'll be gettin' the lieutenant a brevet for this," said he, "if we can only close up with those blackguards." And these were the words Folsom carried back with him, as, mounting a willing trooper's horse, he galloped homeward to reassure his wife, thanking God for the opportune coming of the little command, yet

swearing with close-compressed lips at the ill-starred work of the day. Thus far he had striven to keep from her all knowledge of the threats of the Ogallallas, although he knew she must have heard of them. He had believed himself secure so far back from the Platte. He had done everything in his power to placate Red Cloud and the chiefs—to convince his former friends that he had never enticed poor Lizette, as Baptiste had called the child, from her home and people. They held he should never have left her, though she had accused him of no wrong. Burning Star, in his jealous rage, hated him, because he believed that but for love of the paleface Lizette would have listened to his wooing, and Folsom's conscience could not acquit him of having seen her preference and of leading her on. He could not speak of her to his wife without shame and remorse. He had no idea what could have been her fate, for the poor girl had disappeared from the face of the earth, and now, at last, this day had proved to him the threats of her lover and her brothers were not idle. He had had so narrow a squeak for his life, so sharp and sudden and hard a fight for it that, now that the peril was over, his nerve began to give way, his strong hands to tremble. Armed with breech-loaders, he and his two friends had been able to stand off the attacking party, kill-

ing two ponies, and emptying, they felt sure, two saddles; but little by little the Indians were working around their position, and would have crawled upon them within an hour or two but for Jake's daring ride for help and the blessed coming of the bluecoats in the nick of time. Folsom swore he'd never forget their services this day.

And as he cantered homeward he could still hear the distant firing dying away in the mountains to the north. "Give 'em hell, Dean!" he muttered through his set teeth. "They're showing fight even when you've got 'em on the run. I wonder what that means?"

Not until another day was he to know. Late on the evening of the attack, while he was seated with his wife by Jake's bedside, half a dozen troopers, two of them wounded and all with worn-out horses, came drifting back to camp. Twice, said they, had the fleeing Indians made a stand to cover the slow retreat of one or two evidently sorely stricken, but so closely were they pressed that at last they had been forced to abandon one of their number, who died, sending his last vengeful shot through the lieutenant's hunting shirt, yet only grazing the skin. Dean, with most of the men, pushed on in pursuit, determined never to desist so long as there was light, but these who returned could not keep up.

Leaving the dead body of the young brave where it lay among the rocks, they slowly journeyed back to camp. No further tidings came, and at daybreak Folsom, with two ranchmen and a trooper, rode out on the trail to round up the horses the Indians had been compelled to drop. Mrs. Hal clung sobbing to him, unable to control her fears, but he chided her gently and bade her see that Jake lacked no care or comfort. The brave fellow was sore and feverish, but in no great danger now. Five miles out in the foothills they came upon the horses wandering placidly back to the valley, but Folsom kept on. Four miles further he and a single ranchman with him came upon three troopers limping along afoot, their horses killed in the running fight, and one of these, grateful for a long pull at Folsom's flask, turned back and showed them the body of the fallen brave. One look was enough for Hal and the comrade with him. "Don't let my wife know—who it was," he had muttered to his friend. "It would only make her more nervous." There lay Chaska, Lizette's eldest brother, and well Hal Folsom knew *that* death would never go unavenged.

"If ever a time comes when I can do you a good turn, lieutenant," said he that afternoon as, worn out with long hours of pursuit and scout, the troop

was encountered slowly marching back to the Laramie, "I'll do it if it costs me the whole ranch." But Dean smiled and said they wouldn't have missed that chance even for the ranch. What a blessed piece of luck it was that the commanding officer at Frayne had bidden him take that route instead of the direct road to Gate City! He had sent men riding in to both posts on the Platte, with penciled lines telling of the Indian raid and its results. Once well covered by darkness the little band had easily escaped their pursuers, and were now safe across the river and well ahead of all possibility of successful pursuit. But if anything were needed to prove the real temper of the Sioux the authorities had it. Now was the time to grapple that Ogallalla tribe and bring it to terms before it could be reinforced by half the young men in the villages of the northern plains. The Platte, of course, would be patrolled by a strong force of cavalry for some weeks to come, and no new foray need be dreaded yet awhile. Red Cloud's people would "lay low" and watch the effect of this exploit before attempting another. If the White Father "got mad" and ordered "heap soldiers" there to punish them, then they must disavow all participation in the affair, even though one of their best young braves was prominent in

the outrage, and had paid for the luxury with his life—even though Burning Star was trying to hide the fresh scar of a rifle bullet along his upper arm. Together Dean and Folsom rode back to the ranch, and another night was spent there before the troop was sufficiently rested to push on to Emory.

"Remember this, lieutenant," said Folsom again, as he pressed his hand at parting, "there's nothing too good for you and "C" Troop at my home. If ever you need a friend you'll find one here."

And the time was coming when Marshall Dean would need all that he could muster.

Two days later—still a march away from Emory—a courier overtook him with a letter from his late post commander: "Your vigorous pursuit and prompt, soldierly action have added to the fine record already made and merit hearty commendation." The cordial words brought sunshine to his heart. How proud Jess would be, and mother! He had not had a word from either for over a week. The latter, though far from strong, was content at home in the loving care of her sister, and in the hope that he would soon obtain the leave of absence so long anticipated, and, after Jess's brief visit to Pappoose's new home, would come to gladden the eyes of kith and kin, but mother's most of all, bringing Jessie with him. Little hope of leave of absence was

there now, and less was he the man to ask it with such troubles looming up all along the line of frontier posts to the north. But at least there would be the joy of seeing Jess in a few days and showing her his troop—her and Pappoose. How wonderfully that little schoolgirl must have grown and developed! How beautiful a girl she must now be if that photograph was no flatterer! By the way, where was that photo? What had he done with it? For the first time in four days he remembered his picking it up when Mrs. Hal Folsom collapsed at sight of Jake's swooning. Down in the depths of the side pocket of his heavy blue flannel hunting shirt he found it, crumpled a bit, and all its lower left-hand corner bent and blackened and crushed, Chaska's last shot that tore its way so close below the young soldier's bounding heart, just nipping and searing the skin, had left its worst mark on that dainty *carte de visite*. In that same pocket, too, was another packet—a letter which had been picked up on the floor of the hut at Reno after Burleigh left —one for which the major had searched in vain, for it was underneath a lot of newspapers. "You take that after him," said the cantonment commander, as Dean followed with the troop next day, and little dreamed what it contained.

That very day, in the heavy, old-fashioned sleep-

ing-cars of the Union Pacific, two young girls were seated in their section on the northward side. One, a dark-eyed, radiant beauty, gazed out over the desolate slopes and far-reaching stretches of prairie and distant lines of bald bluff, with delight in her dancing eyes. The other, a winsome maid of nineteen, looked on with mild wonderment, not unmixed with disappointment she would gladly have hidden. To Elinor the scenes of her childhood were dear and welcome; to Jessie there was too much that was somber, too little that was inviting. But presently, as the long train rolled slowly to the platform of a rude wooden station building, there came a sight at which the eyes of both girls danced in eager interest—a row of "A" tents on the open prairie, a long line of horses tethered to the picket ropes, groups of stalwart, sunburned men in rough blue garb, a silken guidon flapping by the tents of the officers. It was one of half a dozen such camps of detached troops they had been passing ever since breakfast time—the camps of isolated little commands guarding the new railway on the climb to Cheyenne. Papa, with one or two cronies, was playing "old sledge" in the smoking compartment. At a big station a few miles back two men in the uniform of officers boarded the car, one of them burly, rotund, and sallow. He was shown to the section just in front

of the girls, and at Pappoose he stared—stared long and hard, so that she bit her lip and turned nervously away. The porter dusted the seat and disposed of the hand luggage and hung about the new arrivals in adulation. The burly man was evidently a personage of importance, and his shoulder straps indicated that he was a major of the general staff. The other, who followed somewhat diffidently, was a young lieutenant of infantry, whose trim frock-coat snugly fitted his slender figure.

"Ah, sit down here, Mr.—Mr. Loomis," said the major patronizingly. "So you are going up to the Big Horn. Well, sir, I hope we shall hear good accounts of you. There's a splendid field for officers of the right sort—there—and opportunities for distinction—every day."

At sound of the staff officer's voice there roused up from the opposite section, where he had been dozing over a paper, a man of middle age, slim, athletic, with heavy mustache and imperial, just beginning to turn gray, with deep-set eyes under bushy brows, and a keen, shrewd face, rather deeply lined. There was a look of dissipation there, a shade of shabbiness about his clothes, a rakish cut to the entire personality that had caused Folsom to glance distrustfully at him more than once the previous afternoon, and to meet with coldness the

tentatives permissible in fellow travelers. The stranger's morning had been lonesome. Now he held his newspaper where it would partly shield his face, yet permit his watching the officers across the aisle. And something in his stealthy scrutiny attracted Pappoose.

"Yes," continued the major, "I have seen a great deal of that country, and Mr. Dean, of whom you spoke, was attached to the troop escorting our commission. He is hardly—I regret to have to say it—er—what you imagine. We were, to put it mildly, much disappointed in his conduct the day of our meeting with the Sioux."

A swift, surprised glance passed between the girls, a pained look shot into the lieutenant's face, but before the major could go on the man across the aisle arose and bent over him with extended hand.

"Ah, Burleigh, I thought I knew the voice." But the hand was not grasped. The major was drawing back, his face growing yellow-white with some strange dismay.

"You don't seem sure of my identity. Let me refresh your memory, Burleigh. I am Captain Newhall. I see you need a drink, major—I'll take one with you."

CHAPTER IX.

For nearly a week after the home-coming of his beloved daughter John Folsom was too happy in her presence to give much thought to other matters. By the end of that week, however, the honest old Westerner found anxieties thickening about him. There were forty-eight hours of undimmed rejoicing. Elinor was so radiant, so fond, and had grown, so said the proud father to himself, and so said others, so wondrously lovely. His eyes followed her every movement. He found himself negligent of her gentle little friend and guest, Jessie Dean, to whom he had vowed to be a second father, and such a friend as she had been to his Pappoose when, a homesick, sad-eyed child, she entered upon her schooldays. Elinor herself had to chide him, and with contrition and dismay he admitted his fault, and then for hours nothing could exceed his hospitable attentions to Jessie, who, sorely disappointed because Marshall was not there to meet her, was growing anxious as no tidings came from him. Two

whole days the damsels spent in going over the new house, exclaiming over papa's lavish preparations, but wishing presently that Mrs. Fletcher were not quite so much in evidence, here, there, and everywhere. Only when bedtime came and they could nestle in one or other of their connecting rooms were they secure from interruption, and even then it presently appeared they could not talk confidentially as of old. Folsom had taken them driving each afternoon, he himself handling the reins over his handsome bays, Elinor at his side the first time, and Jessie, with Mrs. Fletcher, occupying the rear seat. But this, Elinor whispered to him, was not as it should be. Her guest should have the seat of honor. So, next day, Jessie was handed to the front and Mrs. Fletcher and Pappoose were placed in rear, and in this order they bowled round the fort and listened to the band and talked with several of the women and one or two officers, but these latter could tell nothing about Lieutenant Dean except that they had been expecting him for two days—he having taken the long way home, which both Jessie and Pappoose considered odd under the circumstances, though neither said so and nobody thought to explain. But the morning of the third day "Miss Folsom"—as the veteran was amazed to hear his daughter addressed, yet on reflection concluded

that he'd be tempted to kick any man who addressed her otherwise—seized a favorable opportunity and whisked her fond father into a corner of his library, and there gave him to understand that in Eastern circles the housekeeper might sometimes, perhaps, accompany the young ladies when they were going shopping, or the like, alone, but that when escorted by papa it was quite unnecessary. It was in fact not at all conventional.

"Bless my soul!" said Folsom. "I supposed that was what she was for. What did these women mean by telling me I must have a companion—a guide—etc.?"

"They meant, you blessed Daddy, that they wished to provide you with—one of their number, and me—with something I do not want. If Mrs. Fletcher is to be housekeeper I have nothing to say, but—don't you think your big daughter old enough and wise enough to select her own companions? Daddy dear," she continued, after a little pause, and nestling close to him with a pathetic look in the big brown eyes, her lips twitching a bit, "I know how loving and thoughtful you have been in all this, and I wouldn't have you think me ungrateful, but—did you believe I was always going to be a little girl? What do you suppose I studied housekeeping for at school? Mrs. Fletcher is engaged, I presume, and

I can't ask you to undo that now, but I wish you had written to me first. However, if you don't mind, there's somebody I'd rather you would invite to take the fourth seat to-day, and then you can have Pappoose beside you, if you wish."

"Why, of course, sweetheart, any one you like."

"Lieutenant Loomis, then, Daddy—the officer we met on the train. Jessie likes him and he's such a friend of her brother—the only one we have yet seen who seems to know him at all. Then you could ask him to dinner, too."

Folsom's face was a study. Doubt and perplexity both were twitching in the little muscles about his lips.

"We met three officers, did we not, Elinor, and I had thought—somewhat of—asking the major and his guest. He said he wished to call. He was here while we were driving yesterday. I met him later."

"Yes, I saw his card," was the hurried, indifferent answer. "But they are not like Mr. Loomis. Daddy, I did not at all like that Captain Newhall, or—for that matter——"

"They both seemed prodigiously struck with you," said Folsom, in misguided confidence yet pardonable pride. "They've done nothing but talk to me about you ever since."

"They did nothing but talk to me all the way over the mountains, except when they were out taking what I have reason to believe was an occasional drink, Daddy mine. Jess had Mr. Loomis to herself. They have found your weak spot, Daddy. They know you love to talk of your daughter. You have only known Major Burleigh a little while, is it not so?"

"Only within the year, perhaps, though of course I've heard of him a great deal."

"And this Captain Newhall, whose regiment is in Louisiana while he's out here on leave—I thought officers went East when they got leave."

"Newhall says he's out here looking over some mining schemes. He has money to invest, I believe."

"He should invest some money in a traveling suit, Daddy dear. That coat and his linen seemed wofully out of condition. Gentlemen are not careless about such matters."

"Oh, he explained that his trunks were delayed in Omaha or somewhere, and were coming along next train. I own I was prejudiced against him, too, but of course if he's a friend and guest of Burleigh's he—he must be all right. He's staying with him at the depot."

"And you've got to invite them to dinner?" asked

Miss Folsom, after another pause, during which she had been thinking deeply.

"Not if you don't want it, pet. Of course they'll expect it. Army officers are hospitable, you know. Burleigh has asked me to dine with him a dozen times, though I've only been there once."

"Then you'll have to invite him, Daddy," was the answer, with quick decision. "Only, just wait for a day or two. Captain Newhall was going right out to the mines, he said, and there may be others we'd be glad to have. Jessie's brother ought to be here any hour."

"Yes," said Folsom dubiously. "I've been thinking about him—I've been wishing——"

But he hesitated and faltered and could not meet the deep brown eyes, so full of searching inquiry and keen intelligence.

"You've been thinking — what, Daddy?" she asked, and now her slender hands were on his shoulders and she was turning him so that she could study his face. "You have been hearing something you do not wish us to know, Daddy dear. I heard Major Burleigh say something to Mr. Loomis about—about Lieutenant Dean, and I know Mr. Loomis did not like it, and Jessie and I can't believe it. Father, where is he? Why doesn't he come? Why do these—these people at the fort

hem and haw and hesitate when they speak about him? Jessie is getting so troubled."

"*I'm* getting troubled, daughter," answered Folsom impulsively. "I never met a likelier young fellow or one that promised to make a better officer. He may be all right, too, only it isn't so much what they *do* say as what they don't say that troubles me. Burleigh here and old Stevens out at the fort and one or two others I've asked about him. Burleigh says he 'lost his nerve' when they met Red Cloud's big band. A boy might be excused for that so long as he didn't misbehave. It was big responsibility for a young lieutenant. But these people, as you speak of them out at the fort, really know very little about Dean. Burleigh says he's in a position that enables him to know so much more about the character and habits of the young officers."

"Surely he can say nothing against Mr. Dean!" exclaimed Pappoose, looking up with quick indignation in her brown eyes. "No one knows how good and generous he has been to Jessie and his mother."

They were standing at the moment in the corner of the library farthest from the doorway. The front windows opened to the north, giving a fine view of the rolling hills rising higher and higher

and looking down upon the grass-grown slopes spread out at their feet, criss-crossed and traversed by hard-beaten roads and trails. Immediately in front of the house Folsom had seeded and watered and coaxed into semblance of a lawn the best turf to be had in that section of Wyoming, and inclosed it in a spick and span white picket fence. The main road between the fort and the railway station passed directly in front of his gate. The side window of the cozy room looked out to the west over the valley of a rushing stream, once rich in trout, but now much infested by the mules from Burleigh's corral, which lay half a mile away to the southeast, out of sight of Folsom's house except from the upper windows. Eager to stock the library with standard works against his daughter's coming, the old trader had consulted a friend among the officers and had sent a lavish order to a house in Chicago. Books, therefore, were there in plenty on the handsome shelves, and they were not ill-chosen either, but it was Mrs. Fletcher who pointed out how stiff and angular everything looked, who introduced the easy lounge, the soft rugs, the heavy hanging portières of costly Navajo blankets. It was her deft touch that draped the curtains at the windows and softened and beautified the lines the hand of man would have left crude and repellent. And

that library had been her favorite haunt; but since the coming of the girls Mrs. Fletcher had seemed to retire to her own room aloft, and to spend no time below stairs that was not demanded by her household duties. Now as the father and daughter were talking earnestly together, they heard Mrs. Fletcher moving about overhead as though looking over the work of the housemaid. Jessie had gone to her own room to write a short letter to her mother. Major Burleigh was to come at 10.30 to drive them out to Pinnacle Butte, a sharp, rocky height far across the valley, from the summit of which a wonderful view was to be obtained. It lacked but five minutes of the time and suddenly Mrs. Fletcher's voice was heard on the floor above. It was a well-modulated voice, gentle and controlled, with a clear, vibrant ring in it that made the words distinctly audible to the hearers below.

"The major's carriage is coming up the street, Miss Dean. There are two officers."

"Two!" exclaimed Jess, starting to her feet, thinking only of her brother. "Oh! I wonder if—" And then they heard her go pit-a-pat through the hall to the front of the house, heard Mrs. Fletcher more deliberately follow, heard presently the beat of horses' hoofs on the hard roadway, and the whir of coming wheels. "I'll go out

to meet them, Elinor—I'll—I'll talk to you more about this some other time. You don't care to go on this ride this morning one bit, do you, dear?" he added uneasily.

"No, father; frankly, I don't—but he has been polite to you and attentive to us. There's no help for it."

And so Folsom went alone to the door to meet his visitors on the porch without, and did not hear, did not see Mrs. Fletcher, who came hastily down the stairs, her face singularly pale, a glitter of excitement in her eyes. On tiptoe she hastened along the broad hall, reaching the library door just as Folsom stepped out on the porch. On tiptoe she darted in, closed the door behind her, almost rushed to the north window, and there grasping the curtain she crouched, heedless of the possibility of observation, and for half a minute clung and crouched and stared. Then, as Folsom's genial, powerful voice was heard in welcoming accents, and heavy footsteps came along the broad board walk, the woman straightened suddenly and, noiseless as before, hurried back across the room and came face to face with the daughter of the house.

"Oh, Miss Folsom!" she faltered, her bosom heaving in violent agitation. "I did not know you

were here. I—excuse me—" and hastened out of the room and up the winding stairs.

"Pappoose" never hesitated. Coolly, quickly, she stepped to the window. Major Burleigh had just reached the top step and was exchanging greeting with his host. The stylish team and glistening wagon were just spinning away.

"It'll be back in five minutes," she heard the quartermaster explain to her father. "Newhall has to meet come people coming in by stage from Green River. I thought I'd rather spend the time here."

And on the back seat, affably waving his hand in adieu, and jauntily lifting his rakish forage cap in salutation general to any of the young ladies who might be watching, sat the gentleman whose regiment was in Louisiana while he was up here on leave looking after mining investments.

CHAPTER X.

"THREE mortal hours," said Miss Folsom to her fond little school friend and chum that afternoon, "have I had to sit or stroll with or listen to Major Burleigh. I never once was able to enjoy the view. What made him hurry us away from the northeast point, do you suppose?"

"Did you notice that, Nell? I did, too, and I was so interested in the view. Away up toward Laramie Peak I could see something through the glasses that looked like a lot of little ants crawling along together. It was just after that—just after we looked through the glass, that he marched us round to the other side. The view toward Green River isn't half as pretty."

"And now he's telling some interminable story to father over their cigars. What shall we do if he hangs on? Father will have to ask him to drive with us to the fort, and there won't be room."

"Unless Mrs. Fletcher gives up her seat," said Jessie demurely.

"Mrs. Fletcher isn't going. A very different person takes her seat to-day, Jess. Father left a note for Mr. Loomis at the hotel and he accepted. Now you see why I don't want Major Burleigh."

It was then long after three o'clock. At five they were to start and Jessie could hardly curb her impatience. The mail from Frayne, so said Folsom, would arrive that evening, and then surely there would be news of Marshall. They had slipped away to their rooms after the bountiful luncheon served on their return, in order, as "Pappoose" expressed it, that the gentlemen might have their cigars in peace. Mrs. Fletcher, after seeing that everything was prepared, had directed the servant to say to Mr. Folsom, on the return of the party, that she would prefer not to appear, and would be glad to keep her room, as she did not feel it at all necessary for the housekeeper to meet strangers, and Folsom felt a sense of relief. It was so much sweeter not to have any presiding genius other than Pappoose, not that he was forgetful of Mrs. Fletcher's merits and services—which were great—but it was plain to see that his daughter would have been happier had no such office existed as that created for this deserving and destitute widow. At three Miss Folsom had gone and tapped at the lady's door—her room was in the third story overlooking the street—

and was very civilly assured that Mrs. Fletcher stood in need of nothing, but, being wearied, she would like a little sleep. No, she did not even care for a cup of tea. Yet Elinor felt confident that the voice that replied to her inquiries came neither from the bed nor the lounge, but from the direction of the front window.

At three the cigars were smoked out and the host and his guest were in the library. It was Folsom's custom, when a possible thing, to take a brief nap after the midday meal, and Elinor felt sure he would be glad of the opportunity now, if Burleigh would only go, but Burleigh wouldn't. In monotonous monologue his voice came floating up to the second floor, drowsy, unbroken in its soporific flow, and the girls themselves, after the morning's drive in the clear, bracing air, felt as though forty winks would be a blessing. Could it be that Burleigh lingered on in hopes of their reappearance below? Might it not be that if relief came not speedily Papa Folsom would yield to the spell and fall asleep in his easy-chair? Was it not Miss Folsom's duty to descend and take the burden of entertainment off those elder shoulders? These thoughts oppressed the girl, and starting up, she cried:

"It's simply wicked of me staying here and letting poor papa be bored to death. Do come down,

Jess, dear, unless you're dreadfully sleepy. He acts just as though he intended never to go."

And Jess promised reluctantly to come down in ten minutes, if he didn't leave; but she hated him, and had hated him ever since he spoke so of Marshall in the car three days before.

The upper hall had been quite dark when Miss Folsom went up to inquire how Mrs. Fletcher was just after luncheon. The door to her little room was tightly closed. The blinds in all the other rooms aloft were drawn against the glare of the sunshine in the cloudless atmosphere; yet now, as Pappoose stepped suddenly out upon the landing, she was surprised to see that the upper floor was much lighter than when she went up half an hour earlier. The maid had not gone thither from the kitchen, and Mrs. Fletcher wished to doze. Who, then, could have opened both blind and door and let in that flood of light? Impulsively the active girl flew up the winding stairs to the third story, and some one suddenly withdrew from the balcony rail, and an instant later, as Miss Folsom reached the top, all became dark again. Mrs. Fletcher's door had unquestionably been open, and was now shut to. She must have been out there listening, and gravely the young girl asked herself what it meant —Mrs. Fletcher's agitation in the library that morn-

ing as she peered out at the major's wagon; her absence from luncheon on account, as she pleaded, of not desiring to appear when company was present; and now, despite her desire to sleep, her vigil at the third-floor landing, where she was surely listening to the sounds from below.

Pondering over the facts, Elinor Folsom slowly retraced her steps and went downstairs. She reached the library none too soon. Old John's eyes were closed, and he was slowly toppling, overcome with sleep. The sound of her cheery voice aroused him, and he started, guilty and crestfallen.

Burleigh's heavy face brightened visibly at her coming. He cared no more for music than does a cat, but eagerly followed her across the broad hall into the parlor when she suggested showing him the beautiful piano papa had given her; and old John, blessing her, lurched for the sofa, buried his hot head in a pillow, and was asleep in ten seconds. Major Burleigh was alone with the lovely daughter of the veteran trader. He was a man of the world; she an unsophisticated girl just out of school—so said Burleigh, albeit a most charming one; and he, who had monopolized her time the entire morning, bore down once more upon his prize.

She had seated herself at the piano, and her long, taper fingers were rippling over the keys. She

knew full well he did not care what she played, and as for herself she did not care just then to play at all. She was thinking of his insinuation at Marshall Dean's expense. She was still pondering over Mrs. Fletcher's stealthy scrutiny of the quartermaster's team. On these two accounts, and no other, he was possessed of certain interest in Elinor's dark-brown eyes, and they were studying him coolly, searchingly, as he drew a chair near the piano stool, and seated himself and met her look with a broad, encouraging smile.

Trill and ripple, ripple and trill her white fingers raced over the keyboard.

"I'm sure you know this waltz, major," she was saying. "They played it beautifully at the Point two summers ago."

"I—ah, yes, it's a charming composition—charming, though I don't recall it's name just now."

"This? why it's one of Godfrey's—'The Hilda,' don't you know? I'm sure you waltz, major."

"I—ah, used to, yes. I was very fond of a waltz," answered Burleigh, whose best efforts in that line could result in nothing better than a waddle. "But of late years I—I—since my bereavement—have practically withdrawn from society." Then, with a languishing smile, he added, "I shall be tempted to re-enter the list now," and

the major drew his chair nearer by full an inch, and prepared to be further "killing."

"Jessie dances divinely," said Miss Folsom. "She simply floats round a room. You should see her waltz with her brother, Major Burleigh. They might be waltzing here this very minute if he were only home. What can have detained him, do you think?"

"I wish I knew," said the quartermaster slowly. "It makes those who are—ah—his friends, you know, anxious in more ways than one, because there is—er—nothing to warrant delay—nothing to —excuse it. He should, in fact, have been at his post, where his troop is sorely needed, full four days ago," and Burleigh looked heavy with portent.

"Is it not possible that he has found something along the lower Laramie—something where his troop is needed much more than here doing stable guard?"

"How can it be possible?" said Burleigh. "The only thing to warrant his delay would be Indians, and there are none south of the Platte; or horse thieves, and they hung the last of the gang three months ago. Mr. Dean, I—ah—regret to say, is fonder of fishing and hunting than of his legitimate duties, and this, I fear, is why he is not here to welcome his sister."

The piano went rippling on, but the brown eyes kept up their steady gaze. In the deep bass chords now her slender fingers were entangled. Slowly and thoughtfully the rich melody swung in the proud waltz rythm through the airy room and floated out upon the summer breeze. A little line was setting deep between the dark, arching eyebrows, a symptom Pappoose's schoolmates had learned to note as a signal for danger, but Burleigh knew her not, as yet.

"It is odd," said she dreamily, "that at the Point the officers spoke so highly of Mr. Dean, and here you seem to think so differently of him. It is a deep disappointment to his sister that he is not here; but, do you know, major, we were saying only this morning before you came that there was some excellent reason for his delay, and we'd know it within another day."

"Oh, ah—er—of course I hope so. I think, pardon me, that that must be a messenger from my office now," for spurred boot-heels were coming briskly up the wooden walk. There was a bounding step on the piazza, a ring at the bell. The servant bustled through the hall and threw open the door. It was not a messenger from the depot, but a stalwart, sunburnt man in rough ranch garb, who whipped

off his broad-brimmed hat and stood abashed within the hall as he asked for Mr. Folsom.

And all of a sudden over went the piano-stool with a crash, and out into the hall, joyous, bounding, light as a fairy, a vision of dark, girlish beauty, went Pappoose.

"Why, Ned Lannion!" she cried, as she seized the swarthy young fellow's hands and shook them up and down. "Don't you know me—Winona that used to be? Why, how well you look! When did you leave the ranch? How did you leave them? Is Hal here—or coming?"

And at sound of her voice old Folsom had started up from his sofa and came trotting out into the hall, just roused from his sleep, and blinking a bit as he, too, held forth cordial, welcoming hands. It was a moment before they could let Ned tell his story, and then it came by jerks.

"We left there early yesterday morning, mum. They're all well now, 'cept Jake, and he'll come out all right, but we had a close call. A war party of Sioux jumped us Wednesday afternoon, and they'd a got away with us but for Lieutenant Dean and his troop. They come along just in time——"

"Ned!" gasped Elinor, "you don't mean they attacked the ranch?"

"No'me. We was down the Lar'mie—rounding

up horses. There was a dozen bucks in the party. It's the first time they've come across in a year that I know of, and they won't be apt to try it again. We shot two of 'em and the cavalry drove 'em a running fight, so hard that they had to leave one of their wounded behind them. He died in a minute. It was—" and then Ned Lannion gulped and stumbled and choked in embarrassment.

"Who was it?" demanded Mr. Folsom, his rugged face pale and twitching, his eyes full of anxiety.

"Chaska, sir. *You* know."

Folsom gripped him by the shoulder. "And Burning Star—did you see him? Was he there?"

"Yes, sir; but those boys of Lieutenant Dean's gave them a lickin' they'll never forget. The ranch is safe as if it was here in Gate City, only Hal he couldn't come himself, and he knowed you'd be anxious for full particulars, so he sent me in with the cavalry. They're out at the fort now."

"Jessie!" cried Elinor, in delight that overmastered the emotion with which she had listened to the tale of her brother's recent peril. Marshall's here—almost home. It's just as we said, Jess. Do come down. He was there just in time to save my brother's life—to drive the Indians back to the river. Come quick—I want to hug you!" And

her dark eyes, flashing with joy and excitement, danced full upon the bulky form of the major, slowly issuing from the parlor door, then beyond as she went bounding by him, all eagerness to clasp her bonny friend in her arms, and shower her with congratulations. And so it happened that both the girls were at the rear of the hall entwined in each other's arms at the foot of the stairs when the ranchman answered Folsom's next question, and then broke out with the abrupt announcement, "I never see a young officer handle his men better. We'd all been in hell by this time if it wasn't for him, yet, by God, sir, the moment he got into the post they clapped him in arrest."

CHAPTER XI.

THAT evening, when John Folsom, half an hour earlier than the stipulated time, drove the girls and their friend, Lieutenant Loomis, out to the fort, Major Burleigh was left to his own devices, and his face plainly showed that he was far from pleased with the way things were going. The news that Marshall Dean had been placed in arrest by order of the commanding officer of Fort Emory, following as it did close on the heels of the tidings of that young officer's prompt and soldierly handling of the crisis at the ranch, made Folsom boil over with wrath. His first word was one of caution, however. "Hush!" he said. "Speak low. Yonder stands his sister. The girls must not know yet." Then, leading the way into the library and closing the door behind them, he demanded all particulars Lannion could give him, which were few enough.

"The lieutenant halted the troop outside the post," said the indignant ranchman, "had it dismount there while he rode on in to report to the commanding officer for instructions. The colonel

was taking his nap after lunch, and the adjutant was at the office, and what does he do but get up from his desk solemn-like, and when the lieutenant says 'I report the arrival of Troop "C" at the post, sir,' the adjutant didn't answer a word, but reached out and got his sabre and began buckling it around him, and then he put on his cap and gloves, and says he, 'Lieutenant Dean, I'm sorry, but my instructions are to place you in close arrest, by order of Colonel Stevens.' Why, you could have knocked me down with the kick of a gopher I was so dumfounded! The lieutenant he didn't say anything for a minute, but turned white and looked like he could have knocked the top of the adjutant's head off. 'An officer will be sent to take charge of the troop,' said the adjutant, 'an' I suppose you'd better confine yourself to your tent, as the colonel means to have them camp there a day or two, until he hears from Captain Brooks as to quarters.' 'Well, will you have the goodness to say what charges have been laid against me?' said Mr. Dean, and the adjutant hemmed, and hawed, and 'lowed that the colonel hadn't formerly drawn 'em up yet, but that a copy would be served on him as soon as they were ready."

"Then I said I'd go right in and find you, and that's all I know."

And then it was that Folsom turned on Burleigh, with gloom in his eye, and said: "By the Eternal, Major Burleigh, I hope you've had nothing to do with this!"

"Nothing in the world, I assure you, Mr. Folsom. I—I deeply regret it. Though, as I have told you, I can hardly be surprised, after what has been said, and—d what I have seen." But the major could not squarely meet the gaze in the keen eyes of the old trader, nor could the latter conceal his suspicions. "I know you wish to hear all the particulars of the affair at the ranch from this gentleman," said the major uneasily, "so I will leave you with him for the present," and backing out into the hall he turned to the foot of the winding staircase where Elinor had met her friend. The girls were still there, their faces clouded with surprise and anxiety. It was an opportunity not to be lost.

"Pray do not be troubled, Miss Folsom," said Burleigh, advancing upon them with outstretched hand, "er, Mr. Folsom merely wants to hear further details from Lannion. I wish to extend my congratulations to you and, ah, this young lady, first upon the fortunate escape of *your* brother," and he bowed over his distended stomach to Elinor, "and second upon the part played by *yours*," and he repeated the bow to Jess, who, however, shrank

away from the extended hand. "It will go far to counteract the stories that I—ah, er—believe you know about—that were in circulation, and most unjustly, doubtless, at—er—his expense."

"Who put them in circulation, Major Burleigh?" asked Pappoose, her brown eyes studying his face as unflinchingly as had her father's gaze a moment before.

"That, my dear young lady I—er—cannot surmise. They are mostly imaginative, I dare say."

But Miss Folsom looked unmollified, Miss Dean agitated, and Burleigh himself had many a reason for feeling ill at ease. Just at the time of all others when he most desired to stand on good terms with the well-to-do old trader and his charming daughter he found himself the object of distrust. He was thinking hard and far from hopefully as a moment later he hastened down the street.

"Tell them to send up my buggy, quick," were his orders as he stepped within his office doorway. Then lowering his voice, "Has Captain Newhall returned?" he asked the chief clerk.

"The captain was here, sir. Left word he needed to take the first train—freight or construction, it made no difference—to Cheyenne and expected to find a letter or package from you, and there's two

telegrams in from Department Headquarters on your desk, sir."

The major turned thither with solemn face, and read them both, his back to his subordinate, his face to the light, and growing grayer every moment. One was a curt notification that ten thousand dollars would be needed at once at Warrior Gap to pay contractors and workmen, and directing him to send the amount from the funds in his keeping. The other read as follows:

"Have all transportation put in readiness for immediate field service. Every wheel may be needed."

This he tossed carelessly aside. Over the first he pondered deeply, his yellow-white face growing dark and haggard.

Ten thousand dollars to be sent at once to Warrior Gap! Workmen's pay! Who could have predicted that? Who could have given such an order? Who would have imagined payment would have to be made before July, when some reasonable amount of work had been done? What could laborers do with their money up there, even if they had it? It was preposterous! It was risky to attempt to send it. But what was infinitely worse—for him—it was impossible. The money was practically already gone, but—not to Warrior Gap.

Those were days when inspectors' visits were like those of other angels, few and far between. The railway was only just finished across the great divide of the Black Hills of Wyoming. Only as far as Cheyenne was there a time schedule for trains, and that—far more honored in the breach than the observance. Passengers bound west of that sinfully thriving town were luckier, as a rule, if they went by stage. Those were days, too, in which a depot quartermaster with a drove of government mules and a corral full of public vehicles at his command was a monarch in the eyes of the early settlers; and when, added to these high-priced luxuries, he had on deposit in various banks from Chicago to Cheyenne, and even here at Gate City, thousands of dollars in government greenbacks expendible on his check for all manner of purposes, from officers' mileage accounts to the day laborer's wages, from bills for the roofing of barracks and quarters to the setting of a single horseshoe, from the purchase of forage and fuel for the dozen military posts within range of his supply trains down to a can of axle grease. Every one knew Burleigh's horses and habits were far more costly than his pay would permit. Everybody supposed he had big returns from mines and stocks and other investments. Nobody knew just what his investments were, and only he knew

how few they were and how unprofitable they had become. Those were days when, as now, disbursing officers were forbidden to gamble, but when, not as now, the law was a dead letter. Burleigh had gambled for years; had, with little remorse, ruined more than one man, and yet stood now awe-stricken and dismayed and wronged by Fate, since luck had turned at last against him. Large sums had been lost to players inexorable as he himself had been. Large sums had been diverted from the government channels in his charge, some to pay his so-called debts of honor, some to cover abstractions from other funds, "robbing Peter to pay Paul," some to silence people who knew too much; some, ay, most of it, in fact, to cover margins, and once money gets started on that grade it slips through one's fingers like quicksilver. At the very moment when Anson Burleigh's envious cronies were telling each other he stood far ahead of the world, the figures were telling him he stood some twenty thousand dollars behind it, and that, too, when he was confronted by two imperative calls for spot cash, one for ten thousand to go to Warrior Gap, another for a sum almost as big to "stake" a man who never yet had turned an honest penny, yet held the quartermaster where he dare not say so—where indeed he dare not say no.

"If you haven't it you know where you can get it —where you have often got it before, and where you'd better get it before it's too late;" these were words said to him that very morning, in tones so low that none but he could hear; yet they were ringing in his head now like the boom of some tolling bell. Time was when he had taken government money and turned it into handsome profit through the brokers of San Francisco and Chicago. But, as Mr. John Oakhurst remarked, "There's only one thing certain about luck, and that is it's bound to change," and change it had, and left him face to face with calamity and dishonor. Where was he to raise the ten thousand dollars that must be sent to the post quartermaster at Warrior Gap? The end of the fiscal year was close at hand. He dare not further divert funds from one appropriation to cover shortages in another. He could borrow from the banks, with a good endorser, but what endorser was there good enough but John Folsom?—the last man now whom he could bear to have suspect that he was in straits. Folsom was reported to be worth two hundred thousand dollars, and that lovely girl would inherit half his fortune. There lived within his circle no man, no woman in whose esteem Burleigh so longed to stand high, and he had blundered at the start. Damn that young cub who

dared to lecture him on the evils of poker! Was a boy lieutenant to shame him before officers of the general's staff and expect to go unwhipped? Was that butt-headed subaltern to be the means of ruining his prospects right here and now when he stood so sorely in need of aid? Was the devil himself in league against him, that that boy's sister should turn out to be the closest friend old Folsom's daughter ever had—a girl to whom father and daughter both were devoted, and through her were doubtless interested in the very man he had been plotting to pull down? Burleigh savagely ground his teeth together.

"Go and hurry that buggy," he ordered, as he crushed the sheet of paper on which he had been nervously figuring. Then, springing up, he began pacing his office with impatient stride. A clerk glanced quickly up from his desk, watched him one moment with attentive eye, and looked significantly at his neighbor. "Old man's getting worse rattled every day," was the comment, as the crash of wheels through loose gravel announced the coming of the buggy, and Burleigh hastened out, labored into his seat, and took the whip and reins. The blooded mare in the shafts darted forward at the instant, but he gathered and drew her in, the nervous creature almost settling on her haunches.

"Say to Captain Newhall when he gets back—that I'll see him this evening," called Burleigh over his shoulder. "Now, damn you, *go*—if you want to!" and the lash fell on the glistening, quivering flank, and with her head pointed for the hard, open prairie, the pretty creature sped like mad over the smooth roadway and whirled the light buggy out past the scattered wooden tenements of the exterior limits of the frontier town—the tall white staff, tipped by its patch of color flapping in the mountain breeze, and the dingy wooden buildings on the distant bluff whirling into view as he spun around the corner where the village lost itself in the prairie; and there, long reaches ahead of him, just winding up the ascent to the post was a stylish team and trap. John Folsom and the girls had taken an early start and got ahead of him.

Old Stevens was up and about as Folsom's carriage drove swiftly through the garrison and passed straight out by the northeast gate. "I'll be back to see you in a moment," shouted the old driver smilelessly, as he shot by the lonely colonel, going, papers in hand to his office, and Stevens well knew he was in for trouble. Already the story was blazing about the post that nothing but the timely arrival of Dean and his men had saved Folsom's ranch, and Folsom's people. Already the men,

wondering and indignant at their young leader's arrest, were shouting over the sutler's bar their pæans in his praise, and their denunciation of his treatment. Over the meeting of sister and brother at the latter's little tent let us draw a veil. He stepped forth in a moment and bade his other visitors welcome, shook hands eagerly with Loomis and urged their coming in, but he never passed from under the awning or "fly," and Folsom well knew the reason.

"Jump out, daughter," he said to Pappoose, and Loomis assisted her to alight and led her straight up to Dean, and for the first time in those two years the ex-cadet captain and the whilom little schoolgirl with the heavy braids of hair looked into each other's eyes, and in Dean's there was amaze and at least momentary delight. He still wore his field rig, and the rent in the dark-blue flannel shirt was still apparent. He was clasping Miss Folsom's hand and looking straight into the big dark eyes that were so unusually soft and humid, when Jessie's voice was heard as she came springing forth from the tent:

"Look, Nell, look! Your picture!" she cried, as with the bullet-marked *carte de visite* in her hand she flitted straight to her friend.

"Why, where did this come from?" asked Miss

Folsom in surprise, "and what's happened to it?—all creased and black there!" Then both the girls and Loomis looked to him for explanation, while Folsom drove away, and even through the bronze and tan the boy was blushing.

"I—borrowed it for a minute—at the ranch just as Jake came in wounded, and there was no time to return it, you know. We had to gallop right out."

"Then—you had it with you in the Indian fight?" cried Jess, in thrilling excitement. "Really? Oh, Nell! How I wish it were mine. But how'd it get so blackened there—and crushed? You haven't told us."

"Tell you some other time, Jess. Don't crowd a fellow," he laughed. But when his eyes stole their one quick glance at Elinor, standing there in silence, he saw the color creeping up like sunset glow all over her beautiful face as she turned quickly away. Lannion had told them of the close shave the lieutenant had had and the havoc played by that bullet in the breast pocket of his hunting shirt.

CHAPTER XII.

MEANTIME "Old Pecksniff," as commentators of the day among the graceless subs were won't to call Colonel Stevens, was having his bad quarter of an hour. Leaving his team with the orderly, John Folsom had stamped into his presence unannounced, and after his own vigorous fashion opened the ball as follows:

"Stevens, what in the devil has that young fellow done to deserve arrest?"

"Oh, ah, shut the door, Mr. Adjutant," said the commanding officer, apprehensively, to his staff officer, "and—d I desire to confer with Mr. Folsom a moment," whereat the adjutant took the hint and then hied himself out of the room.

"Now, ah, in the first place, Mr. Folsom this is rather a long and—d painful story. I'm—m—ah, ah —in a peculiar position."

"For God's sake talk like a man and not like Burleigh," broke in the old trader impulsively. "I've known you off and on over twenty years, and you never used to talk in this asinine way until

you got to running with him. Come right to the point— What crime is young Dean charged with? Those girls of mine will have to know it. They will know he's in arrest. What can I tell them?"

"Crime—ah—is hardly the word, Folsom. There has been a misunderstanding of orders, in short, and he was placed under arrest before—ah—before I had been furnished with a mass of information that should have been sent to me before."

"Well, what fault is that of his? See here, man, you don't mean to say it is because he didn't get here three days ago? That's no crime, and I haven't knocked around with the army the last forty years not to know the regulations in such matters. Do you mean without ever hearing what kept him and what splendid, spirited service he rendered there along the Laramie, that you've humiliated that fine young fellow and put him in arrest?"

Pecksniff whirled around in his chair. "Really now, Mr. Folsom, I can't permit you to instruct me in my military duties. You have no conception of the way in which I've been ignored and misled in this matter. There are collateral circumstances brought about, er—forced on me in fact, by injudicious friends of this young man, and he—he must blame them—he must blame them, not me. Now if you'll permit me to glance over this mass of

matter, I can the sooner do justice in the premises." And over his goggles the colonel looked pleadingly up into his visitor's irate features.

"Read all you like, but be quick about it," was the angry rejoinder. "I want to take that boy back with me to town and confront him with one of his accusers this very day—the man I believe, by the ghost of Jim Bridger, is at the bottom of the whole business!" and Folsom flopped heavily and disgustedly into a chair, at sound of a rap at the door, which opened an inch and the adjutant's nose became visible at the crack.

"Major Burleigh, sir, would like to see you."

"And I'd like to see Major Burleigh!" stormed Folsom, springing to his feet. Commanding officers of the Stevens stamp had no terrors for him. He had known his man too long.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" cried Pecksniff, "I can have no disturbance now over this unfortunate matter. Really, Mr. Folsom, I cannot permit my office to be the scene of any—of any——"

But his words wandered aimlessly away into space as he discovered he had no listener. Folsom, finding that the major had apparently changed his mind and was not coming in, had changed his plan and was going out. He overtook Burleigh on the boardwalk in front and went straight to the point.

"Major Burleigh, you told me a short time ago that you had nothing to do with the allegations against this young gentleman who was placed in arrest here this afternoon, yet I learn from my own daughter that you spoke of him to a brother officer of his in terms of disparagement the day you got aboard the car at Sidney. Mr. Loomis corroborates it and so does Miss Dean. I've heard of two other instances of your speaking sneeringly of him. Now I ask you as man to man what it is you have to tell? He has saved the lives of my son, his wife and child, and the people of the ranch, and by the Eternal I'm his friend and mean to see justice done him!"

Burleigh listened with solemn face and with no attempt to interrupt. He waited patiently until Folsom came to a full stop before he spoke at all. Then his voice was eloquent of undeserved rebuke —of infinite sympathy. "Mr. Folsom," he said, "it would be useless for me to deny that before I knew your charming daughter or her—ah—very interesting friend I did speak in their presence—ah—incautiously, perhaps, of Mr. Dean, but it was in continuance of a conversation begun before we boarded the car, and what I said was more in sorrow than in criticism. The young gentleman had attracted my attention—my favorable—ah—opin-

ion on the up trip to the Big Horn, and I was—ah —simply disappointed in his conduct on the way back. It was perhaps due to—ah—inexperience only, and my whole object in coming here in haste this afternoon was to bear testimony to his ability and zeal as a troop commander, and to urge—ah—Colonel Stevens to reconsider his action and restore him at once to duty. I had hoped, sir, to be here—ah—ahead of you and to have driven him in my buggy—ah—to meet you, but I am disappointed—I am disappointed in more ways than one."

Folsom stood and wiped his streaming face, and looked the speaker square in the eye, and Burleigh stood the scrutiny with unlooked-for nerve. Long years at the poker-table had given him command of his features, and the faculty of appearing the personification of serene confidence in his "hand," when the twitching of a nerve might cost a thousand dollars. Folsom was no match for him in such a game. Little by little the anger and suspicion faded from his eyes, and a shame-faced look crept into them. Had he really so misjudged, so wronged this gentleman? Certainly there was every appearance of genuine sympathy and feeling in Burleigh's benevolent features. Certainly he was here almost as soon as he himself had come, and very possibly for the same purpose. It was all

that old fool Pecksniff's doing after all. Folsom had known him for years and always as more or less of an ass—a man of so little judgment that, though a major in the line at the outbreak of the war, he had never been trusted with a command in the field, and here he was now a full colonel with only three companies left him. Burleigh saw his bluff was telling, and he took courage.

"Come with me," he said, "and let me reassure you," and the doors of the commanding officer's sanctum opened at once to the omnipotent disburser of government good things, Folsom following at his heels. "Colonel Stevens," he began, the moment he was inside, and before the colonel could speak at all, "in a moment of exasperation and extreme nervous—ah—depression the night I—er—started East so hurriedly after a most exhausting journey from the Big Horn, I spoke disparagingly of the action of Lieutenant Dean in face of the Indians the day we met Red Cloud's band, but on mature reflection I am convinced I misjudged him. I have been thinking it all over. I recall how vigilant and dutiful he was at all times, and my object in hurrying out here to-day, at—ah—almost the instant I heard of his arrest, was to put in the best words I could think of in his behalf—to—ah—urge you to reconsider your action, especially in

view of all the—e—ah—encomiums passed upon his conduct in this recent raid on the Laramie."

The colonel whirled around upon him as he had on Folsom. "Major Burleigh," he began, "I call you to witness that I am the most abused man in the army. Here am I, sir, thirty-five years in service, a full colonel, with a war record with the regulars that should command respect, absolutely ignored by these mushroom generals at Omaha and elsewhere—stripped of my command and kept in ignorance of the movements of my subordinates. Why, sir," he continued, lashing himself on, as he rose from his chair, "here's my junior at Frayne giving orders to my troop, sir; presumes to send them scouting the Laramie bottoms, when every man is needed here, and then, when, as it happens, my officer and his men get into a fight and drive the Indians, to whom does he report, sir? Not to me, sir—not to his legitimate commander, but he sends couriers to Laramie and to Frayne, and ignores me entirely."

A light dawned on Burleigh in an instant. Well he knew that Dean's reasons for sending couriers to those guard posts of the Platte were to warn them that a war party had crossed into their territory, and was now in flight. There was nothing to be gained by sending a man galloping back to the line

of the railway seventy-five miles to the rear—no earthly reason for his doing so. But the fact that he had sent runners to officers junior in rank to Stevens, and had not sent one to him, fairly "stuck in the crop" of the captious old commander, and he had determined to give the youngster a lesson. But now the mail was in, and dispatches from various quarters, and a telegram from Omaha directing him to convey to Lieutenant Dean the thanks and congratulations of the general commanding the department, who had just received full particulars by wire from Cheyenne, and Stevens was glad enough to drop the game, and Burleigh equally glad of this chance to impress Folsom with the sense of his influence, as well as of his justice.

"I admit all you say, colonel. I have long—ah—considered you most unfairly treated, but really—ah—in this case of Lieutenant Dean's, it is, as I said before, inexperience and—ah—the result of—ah—er—not unnatural loss of—er—balance at a most exciting time. A word of—ah—admonition, if you will pardon my suggestion, all he probably needs, for he has really behaved very well—ah—surprisingly well in conducting this—ah—pursuit."

And so was it settled that later the colonel was to see Mr. Dean, and admonish accordingly, but

that meantime the adjutant should go and whisper in his ear that his arrest was ended, and all would be explained later, thereby releasing him before the girls discovered the fact that he was confined to his tent.

But the adjutant came too late. The tearful eyes of one, the flushed and anxious faces of both damsels, and the set look in the eyes of both the young officers at Dean's tent, as the adjutant approached, told him the cat was out of the bag. "The explanation cannot be made too promptly for me, sir," said Dean, as he received the colonel's message and permitted the adjutant to depart without presenting him to the two prettiest girls he had seen in a year. "Now, Loomis, just as quick as possible I want you to go with me to that man Burleigh. I'll cram his words down his throat."

"Hush, Dean, of course, I'll stand by you! But —both girls are looking. Wait until to-morrow."

How many a project for the morrow is dwarfed or drowned by events unlooked for—unsuspected at the time! Not ten minutes later Folsom and Burleigh came strolling together to the little tent. Ashamed of his apparently unjust accusation, Folsom had begged the quartermaster's pardon and insisted on his coming with him and seeing the young people before driving back to town. The horses

were being groomed at the picket line. The western sun was low. Long shadows were thrown out over the sward and the air was full of life and exhilaration. The somber fears that had oppressed the quartermaster an hour earlier were retiring before a hope that then he dare not entertain.

"You—you stood by me like a trump, Burleigh," old Folsom was saying, "even after I'd abused you like a thief. If I can ever do you a good turn don't you fail to let me know."

And Burleigh was thinking then and there how desperately in need of a good turn he stood that minute. What if Folsom would back him? What if——

But as they came in full view of the picket line beyond the row of tents, the major's eagerly searching gaze was rewarded by a sight that gave him sudden pause. Halted and examining with almost professional interest the good points of a handsome little bay, Lieutenant Loomis and Jessie Dean were in animated chat. Halted and facing each other, he with glowing admiration in his frank blue eyes, she with shy pleasure in her joyous face, Dean and Elinor Folsom stood absorbed in some reminiscence of which he was talking eagerly. Neither saw the coming pair. Neither heard the rapid beat of bounding hoofs nearing them in eager haste.

Neither noted that a horseman reined in, threw himself from saddle and handed Burleigh a telegraphic message which, with trembling hands, he opened and then read with starting eyes.

"My heaven, Folsom!" he cried. "I ought to have known something was coming when I got orders to have every mule and wheel ready. Everything's to be rushed to the Big Horn at once. Just as you predicted, Red Cloud's band has broken loose. There's been a devil of a fight not eighty miles from Frayne!"

CHAPTER XIII.

And now indeed came for Marshall Dean a time in which he could see a divided duty. A camp of woodchoppers in one of the deep, sequestered valleys of the mountains had been suddenly set upon by a host of mounted Indians that seemed, like the warriors born of the dragon's teeth, to spring up from the earth, and yelling like fiends bore down upon the little guard. Happily for the woodchoppers, but unluckily for Lo, the commander was a cool-headed veteran of the late war who had listened time and again to yells as frantic and had withstood charge after charge ten times as determined. Most unluckily for Lo the infantry company was armed with the new Springfield breech-loader, and when the band came exultantly on, having, as they supposed, drawn the fire when full four hundred yards away, they were confounded by the lively crackle and sputter of rifles along the timber in front of them, toppling many a dashing warrior to earth and strewing the ground with

slaughtered ponies. That charge failed, but they rallied in furious force. There were only forty soldiers: they had five hundred braves, so on they came again from three different points, and again did Powell's sheltered blue coats scatter them like red autumn leaves before the storm. Thrice and four times did they essay to stampede the soldiers and sweep off their own dead and wounded, and each time were they soundly thrashed, thanks to cool courage and the new breech-loaders. And Red Cloud, cursing his medicine men, drew off his baffled braves and the hills that night resounded to their vengeful war-whoops and echoed back the wailing of the Indian women mourning over the slain. "All well enough so far, lads," cried Folsom, when he heard the news. "Machpealota is unmasked. It's war to the knife now, so for God's sake send all the troops you can muster to the aid of those already up there in the Big Horn. Next time he hits he'll have all the Northern Sioux at his back, you mark my words!"

But, who the devil is John Folsom? said the Bureau again. Arrest Red Cloud. Bring his band in prisoners, were the orders to the agents, and the agents called for troops to go and do their bidding. It's one thing, as I've had occasion to say before, to stand off with breech-loaders a thousand Indians

armed only with old percussion cap muskets, squirrel rifles, bows, clubs and lances; it's another thing for soldiers armed even with the best the market affords, to march into an Indian position and arrest an Indian chief. There were not soldiers enough north of the Platte to do it, and the War Department knew it if the Bureau didn't. Hence the mustering in force along the river, and the mounting in hot haste of perhaps ten more troops and companies, nowhere near enough for the work in hand, but all the nation had within a month's march that could possibly be spared from other work and work more important.

And there was wrath at Emory, where the colonel found himself ordered to send all his transportation to Frayne forthwith, and all his remaining troops except one of foot. "Damnation! I've only got two companies of foot," he screamed, in the shrill treble of piping senility. "And they mean to rob me of my cavalry, too! 'C' troop is ordered to be held in readiness for special service."

The transportation, consisting of three wagons and two ambulances, with the somber company of infantry, started next day, however, and Dean, with eager expectancy kept his men in camp, cooked rations ready, ammunition pouches filled, arms and equipments overhauled and in perfect order, horses

examined and reshod, ready for the word that might come any minute and carry him—he knew not whither. Folsom and the girls had to drive back to dinner without him. Despite the permission sent by the colonel, he would not leave his troop and go in town. So back they came in the soft moonlight and spent a long, lovely summer evening with him, while the band played melodiously in the fort inclosure, and the stars twinkled over the peaks of the Rockies in the southern skies. Folsom spent the hours wiring to Omaha and conferring with such officers as he could reach. They thought the lesson given Red Cloud would end the business. He knew it would only begin it. Burleigh, saying that he must give personal attention to the selection of the teams and wagons, spent the early evening in his corral, but sent word to Folsom that he hoped to see him in the morning on business of great importance. He had other hopes, too, one of them being that now the order to send that big sum in currency to the new stockade would be revoked. He had lost no time in suggesting to the chief quartermaster of the department the extreme hazard. He quoted Folsom as saying that before we could send one hundred men to Warrior Gap Red Cloud could call five thousand, and the chief quartermaster, being a man of method and a

stranger to the frontier said, as said the Bureau "Who the devil is John Folsom? Do as you are told." But that answer only came the following day. Meantime there was respite and hope.

Long lived that beautiful evening in the memory of four young hearts. A sweet south wind had been gently playing all day and left the night warm and fragrant of the pines and cedars in the mountain parks. All Fort Emory seemed made up of women and children now, for such few soldiers as were left, barring the bandsmen, were packing or helping pack and store about the barracks. From soon after eight until nearly ten the musicians occupied their sheltered wooden kiosk on the parade, and filled the air with sweet strains of waltz or song or stirring martial melody.

For an hour, with Elinor Folsom on his arm, young Dean was strolling up and down the moonlit walk, marveling over the beauty of her dark, yet winsome face, and Loomis and Jessie, stanch friends already, sauntered after them. For a time the merry chat went on unbroken. They were talking of that never-to-be-forgotten visit to the Point —Pappoose's first—and of the hop to which the tall cadet captain took the timid schoolgirl, and of her hop card and the distinguished names it bore, as names ran in the old days of the battalion; of Ray,

who danced so beautifully and rode so well—he was with the —th cavalry now somewhere along the U. P., said Dean—and of Billings the cadet adjutant; he was with a light battery in Louisiana. "Where this Captain Newhall is stationed," interrupted Pappoose, with quick, upward look. "I wonder if he knows him, Mr. Dean."

"He doesn't like him, I'll venture to say," said Dean, "if Newhall doesn't suit you and Jessie, and I'm sure I shan't." And then they went on to talk of the lovely dance music they had at the Point that summer, and how bewitchingly Elsen used to play that pretty galop—"Puckwudjies"—the very thing for a moonlit night. One could almost see the Indian fairies dancing about their tiny fires.

"It was that galop—my first at West Point—that I danced with Cadet Captain Dean," said Pappoose, looking blithely up into his steadfast eyes. "You've no idea what a proud girl I was!" They were at the upper end of the parade at the moment. The kiosk was only fifty yards away, its band lights sparkling under the canopy, the moonlight glinting on the smooth surface of the dancing floor that an indulgent post commander had had placed there. Half a dozen young garrison girls, arm in arm and by twos, were strolling about its waxen face awaiting the next piece; and some of them had been

importuning the leader, for at the moment, soft and rippling, sweet and thrilling, quick and witching, the exquisite opening strains of "Puckwudjies" floated out upon the night.

"Oh, Jess! Listen!" cried Elinor in ecstasy and surprise, as she turned back with quickly beating heart.

"No, no, indeed!" replied her soldier escort, with a throb in his breast that echoed and overmastered that in her own. "No time to listen—come! It was your first galop at the Point—let it be our first in Wyoming." And in a moment more the tall, lithe, supple, slender forms were gliding about the dancing-floor in perfect time to the lovely music, but now her dark eyes could not meet the fire in the blue. Following their lead, Loomis and Jessie joined the dance. Other couples from along the row hastened to the scene. In five minutes a lively hop was on at Emory, and when at last, breathing a little hurriedly and with heightened color, Elinor Folsom glanced up into his joyous and beaming face—"You had forgotten that galop, Mr. Dean," she archly said, but down went the dark eyes again at his fervent reply.

"Yes, I admit it; but so long as I live I'll never forget this."

Small wonder was it that when Burleigh came

driving out at tattoo for a brief conference with the colonel, his sallow face took on a darker shade as he suddenly caught sight of that couple standing at the moment apart from the dancers, seeing neither them nor him, hearing for the moment no music but that which trembled in the tones of his deep voice, for Elinor was strangely silent.

"Marshall Dean," whispered Jessie that night, as she hugged him before being lifted to her seat, "tell me true, wasn't Pappoose's picture in your heart pocket? Didn't that bullet crease it?"

"Promise on your honor not to tell, Jess," he whispered.

She nodded delightedly.

"Yes, and what's more, it's there now!'

Early on the morrow came further news. Troops from Steele and Bridger were on the move, but no word came for the cavalry at Emory, and Marshall Dean, hitherto most eager for field service, learned with joy he felt ashamed to own that he had still another day to spend in the society of Jessie and her friend. But how much of that elation Jessie could have claimed as due to her every sister whose brother is in love can better tell than I. At eight they came driving out to hear the band at guard-mounting, though to old Pecksniff's pathetic sorrow he could mount only twelve men all told. That

ceremony over, they watched with kindling eyes the sharp drill of Marshall's troop; that soldierly young commander, one may feel well assured, showing his men, his horses, and himself off to the best of his ability, as who would not have done under such scrutiny as that. Loomis was with them, but Elinor drove, for her father had urgent business, he said, and must remain at his office. Major Burleigh, he added, was to meet him, whereat the girls were silent.

"If you could have heard the major pleading with that cantankerous old fool at the fort in Marshall's behalf you would get over your wrath at Burleigh just as I did," said Folsom, to both, apparently, and still neither answered. Burleigh was evidently *persona non grata* in the eyes of both. "He tells me Captain Newhall is still here, waiting for a train to be made up to run back to Cheyenne. I'm afraid I'll have to ask him to bring the captain to dinner to-day. Do you think Mr. Dean will care to come?" he asked.

"I think he would rather not leave camp," said Jessie slowly. "Orders may come any minute, he says."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered Folsom, vaguely relieved. Something told him there was antagonism between the young fellow and Burleigh that

would be apt to involve Newhall, too. "I'll ask them both, if you don't very much mind," he went on, whispering to Elinor. "And will you tell Mrs. Fletcher? How is she this morning?"

"Just as usual, papa. She says she has rather violent headaches once in a while, and she thinks it prudent to keep her room to-day. But I can attend to everything." Indeed, thought the daughter, she wished she had it all to do.

And so Folsom had gone to meet Burleigh, and the girls had planned, at least Jessie had, that Marshall after drill should ride beside them into town and have a chat in the parlor while she wrote to mother in the library. But a thing happened that no one could have foreseen. Just before drill was over and while they were still watching it from their seats in the covered wagon, a buggy drove up alongside and Major Burleigh jumped out, gave the reins to his companion and bade him come to him as soon as he had finished what he wished to do at the sutler's. The major's face was perturbed, that of his companion looked black and ugly. It was Captain Newhall, and something was amiss. The latter barely tipped his hat in driving away, the former heaved a sigh of relief, then turned to greet the girls.

Ten minutes passed in constraint and awkward-

ness. Burleigh felt that he was unwelcome, but his eyes were fixed in fascination on Elinor Folsom, and he could not go. Presently drill was dismissed, and Dean, all aglow, came galloping up, his orderly trumpeter following. Not until he had joyously greeted both the girls did he see who was standing by the forward wheel on the opposite side.

"Good-morning, Mr. Dean," said Burleigh affably. "I never saw that troop look so well."

"Good-morning, sir," said Dean coldly. Then turned to speak again to Miss Folsom when the buggy came whirring back.

"He isn't here, Burleigh," said the occupant petulantly. "He's in town, and you've got to find him right off. Come on!"

Burleigh turned livid. "Captain Newhall," he said, "you fail to notice I am with friends."

"They are friends who will be glad to get rid of you, then," replied the stranger thickly, and it was easy to see that he had been drinking. All the same Burleigh went.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER day Dean and Troop "C" were held in camp awaiting orders for special service, and no orders came. "Old Pecksniff" had an eye for pretty girls, a trait by no means rare in soldiers old or young, and prettier girls than Pappoose and Jessie he had never met. Mrs. Stevens was accordingly bidden to invite them to luncheon that very day, and Dean and Loomis were of the party, as were other young people of the post, and, despite the rising war clouds in the north and the recent unpleasantness at Emory and an odd manner indicative of suppressed excitement on part of both Dean and Loomis, a very joyous time they had until the damsels had to drive home to dress for dinner. Folsom had named six as the hour. Burleigh, Newhall and the two boys were mentioned as his guests. Burleigh accepted for self and partner, Loomis for himself, with mental reservation. Dean at once had begged to be excused. After the morning's disappearance of Burleigh and "Surly," as Miss Folsom promptly named the pair, Marshall had ridden into

Gate City at the side of the Folsom carriage, and was welcomed by the old trader himself, who looked pained when told he could not attend the dinner. "Surely Colonel Stevens will let you off," said Folsom, but that obviously was not the reason.

"I'm the only officer with my troop," said Dean, "and so cannot ask."

But when Folsom took his daughter in his arms a little later and inquired whether there were not some graver cause behind the one assigned, Elinor calmly answered that she thought there was, and that the cause was Major Burleigh.

"But, daughter dear," said he, "that's just one reason I wish to bring them together. Then Dean could see how pleasantly disposed the major is," and he was amazed when she replied :

"Major Burleigh may be pleasantly disposed, but Mr. Dean is not, by any means, nor would I be were I in his place, papa."

"My child," said he, "what do you know about it?"

"Everything that Jessie knows, besides what we heard on the train. Mar—Mr. Dean told her of several things Major Burleigh had said and done to his discredit, and no wonder he declines to dine with a man who has deliberately maligned him."

"I wish I had thought of that," said Folsom, his

knotty hands deep in the pockets of his loose-fitting trousers. "I saw Burleigh this morning on some business, and he seemed to want to help Dean along. What took him out to the fort, do you suppose?"

"I don't know," she answered gravely. "He had Captain Newhall with him, in quest of somebody who wasn't there."

"Ah, yes, Griggs, the sutler. I heard of it," interposed Folsom, fingering his watchchain.

"Very possibly. The captain was ugly and rude in manner and Major Burleigh very much embarrassed. Indeed, Daddy dear, I should not be greatly surprised if others of your party failed to come."

"Burleigh, do you mean, or his queer guest?"

But Pappoose did not reply. She seemed listening intently, and then with swift, sudden movement darted across to the heavy Navajo blanket portière that hung at the doorway of a little room back of the library. Her voice was far from cordial as she asked:

"Were you looking for any one, Mrs. Fletcher? I thought you were in your room."

"For Mr. Folsom, please, when he is at leisure," was the answer, in unruffled tones. "I believe it easier to take active part in the preparations than to lie there thinking."

At one the girls were to lunch at the fort, as has been said, and it was time for them to dress. There were other matters on which Elinor much wished to talk with her father and, with more reluctance than she had yet experienced, she left him to hear what Mrs. Fletcher might have to say. The conference was brief enough, whatever its nature, for presently his voice was heard at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm going over to the depot a few minutes, Daught. I wish to see Burleigh. Don't wait for me. Start whenever you are ready. Where do the boys meet you?"

"Here, Daddy, at half-past twelve."

It was high noon now, and the ruddy-faced old fellow grew redder as the summer sun beat down on his gray head, but he strode sturdily down the broad avenue that led to the heart of the bustling new town, turned to the right at the first cross street beyond his own big block, and ten minutes' brisk tramp brought him to the gateway of Burleigh's stockaded inclosure. Two or three employees lounging about the gate were gazing curiously within. Silently they let him pass them by, but a sound of angry voices rose upon the heated air. Just within the gate stood the orderly trumpeter holding two horses by the reins, one of them

Marshall Dean's, and a sudden idea occurred to Folsom as he glanced at the open windows of the office building. There was no mistaking the speaker within. It was Burleigh.

"Leave my office instantly, sir, or I'll prefer charges that will stick——"

"Not till I've said what I came to say, Major Burleigh. I've abundant evidence of what you've been saying at my expense. You asserted that I lost my nerve the day we met Red Cloud's band—you who never dared get out of the ambulance until the danger was over. It's common talk in the troop. At Frayne, at Reno, and here at Emory you have maligned me just as you did in the cars to my friend here, Mr. Loomis, and in hearing of my sister. I will not accept your denial nor will I leave your office till you swallow your words."

"Then, by God, I'll have you thrown out, you young whipsnapper!"

And then Folsom, with fear at his heart, ran around to the doorway to interpose. He came too late. There was a sound of a furious scuffle within, a rattling of chairs, a crunching of feet on sanded floor, and as he sprang up the steps he saw Dean easily squirming out from the grasp of some member of the clerical force, who, at his master's bidding, had thrown himself upon the young officer,

who then deftly tripped his heels from under him and dropped him on the floor, while Loomis confronted the others who would have made some show of obeying orders. And then there was the whirr of a whip-lash, a crack and snap and swish, and a red welt shot across Burleigh's livid face as he himself staggered back to his desk. With raging tongue and frantic oath he leaped out again, a leveled pistol in his hand, but even before he could pull trigger, or Folsom interpose, Loomis's stick came down like a flash on the outstretched wrist, and the pistol clattered to the floor.

"Good God, boys! what are you doing?" cried the trader, as he hurled himself between them. "Stop this instantly. Sit down, Burleigh. Come out, Dean—come out at once! And you, too, Loomis."

"I'm entirely ready—now," said the cavalry lieutenant, though his eyes were flaming and his lips were rigid. "But whenever Major Burleigh wants to finish this he can find me," and with these words he backed slowly to the door, face to the panting and disordered foe.

"Finish this! you young hound, I'll finish you!" screamed Burleigh, as he shook his clinched fist at the retiring pair.

"Go, boys, go!" implored Folsom. "I'll see you

by and by. No—no—sit still, Burleigh. Don't you speak. This must stop right here."

And so the old man's counsels prevailed, and the two friends, with grave, pallid, but determined faces, came out into the sunshine, and with much deliberation and somewhat ostentatious calm proceeded to where the orderly waited with the horses.

"You will see—the ladies out to camp, Loomis?" asked Dean. "I must gallop on ahead."

"Ay, ay, go on, I reckon——"

But on this scene there suddenly appeared a third party, in the partial guise of an officer and the grip of Bacchus. Lurching down the office steps, with flushed face and bloodshot eyes, came Captain Newhall.

"Gen'l'm'n," said he thickly, "le'm 'ntroduce m'self. Haven't th' honor y'r 'quain's. I'm Ca'm New(hic)'ll. Cap'n N-n-(hic)oohaul (this cost prodigious effort and much balancing), an'—an' you sherv'd that f'ler per-per-flicky ri'. He's dam scoun'rl—gen'lemen—an' ole frien' mine."

For an instant he stood swaying unsteadily, with half-extended hand. For an instant the two young officers gazed at him in contempt, then turned abruptly away.

"Good Lord, Marshall," said Loomis, as they cleared the gate, "if that's the only approbation this

day's work will bring us what will the results be? You served him right, no doubt, but—" and an ominous shake of the head wound up the sentence.

"But or no but," said Dean, "it's done now, and I'd do it again."

There was no dinner party at Folsom's that evening. At two a messenger trotted out to the post with a note for Miss Folsom to apprise her of the fact, and without a word or change of color she put it into her pocket. The garrison girls were bent on having them spend the afternoon, but presently Miss Folsom found a moment in which to signal to Jess, and at three they were driving home.

"You will surely come out this evening and hear the music and have a dance," were the parting salutations, as with skillful hands the young girl took up the reins.

"We hope to," was her smiling answer. Jess was clinging to her brother's hand as he stood by the wheel, and Loomis had already clambered in beside her.

"Please come, Marshall," pleaded Jessie; but he shook his head.

"I must be at camp this evening, sister mine. We go to stables in an hour. You will come back, Loomis?"

"As soon as I've seen—" and a significant nod supplied the ellipsis.

Something ominous was in the wind and both girls knew it. Loomis, usually gay and chatty, was oddly silent, as the light, covered wagon sped swiftly homeward. Beside the fair charioteer sat a young officer of the infantry who, vastly rejoicing that Dean could not go, had laughingly possessed himself of the vacant place, and to him Miss Folsom had to talk. But they parted from their escorts at the gate and hastened within doors. Just as Elinor expected, papa had not come home. It was nearly six when she saw him striding slowly and thoughtfully up the road, and she met him at the gate.

"Tell me what has happened, Daddy," was her quiet greeting, as she linked her hands over his burly arm, and looking into her uplifted, thoughtful eyes, so full of intelligence and deep affection, he bent and kissed her cheek.

"By Jove, daughter, I believe it's the best thing I can do. Come into the library."

That night the moon beamed brightly down on the wide-spreading valley, glinting on the peaks, still snow-tipped, far in the southern sky, and softening the rugged faces of the nearer range, black with their clustering beard of spruce and pine. The

band played sweetly on the broad parade until after the tattoo drums had echoed over the plains and the garrison belles strolled aimlessly in the elfin light—all nature so lavishly inviting, yet so little valued now that nearly every man was gone. Out in the camp of "C" Troop men were flitting swiftly to and fro, horses were starting and stamping at the picket ropes, eager eyes and tilted ears inquiring the cause of all this stir and bustle among the tents. In front of the canvas home of the young commander a grave-faced group had gathered, two gentle girls among them, one with tear-dimmed eyes. Old Folsom stood apart in murmured conference with Griggs, the sutler. The regimental quartermaster was deep in consultation with Dean, the two officers pacing slowly up and down. One or two young people from the garrison had spent a few minutes earlier in the evening striving to be interesting to the girls; but Jessie's tearful eyes and Miss Folsom's grave manner proved hint sufficient to induce them to withdraw, each bidding Dean good-night, safe journey and speedy return, and the hand-clasps were kind and cordial. The colonel himself had paid a brief visit to camp, his adjutant in attendance, and had given Mr. Dean ten minutes of talk concerning a country Dean knew all about, but that "Peck-sniff" had never seen. "It is a responsibility I

own I should have expected to see placed on older shoulders," said he, "but prudence and—and, let me suggest, cool-headedness—will probably carry you through. You will be ready to start——"

"Ready now, sir, so far as that's concerned; but we start at three."

"Oh, ah—yes, of course—well—ah—it leaves me practically with no command, but I'll hope to have you back, Mr. Dean. Good-by." Then as he passed Folsom the colonel whispered: "That's ten thousand dollars as good as thrown away."

"Ten thousand dollars!" answered the trader in reply. "What do you mean?"

"That's what those boys are to run the gauntlet with. My—ah—protests are entirely unavailing."

For a moment Folsom stood there dumb. "Do you mean," he finally cried, "that—that it's beyond Frayne that they're going—that it's money they're to take?"

"Hush! Certainly, but it mustn't be known. Every road agent in Wyoming would be out, and every Indian from the Platte to Hudson's Bay would be on the watch. He's to take ten men and slip through. The money comes out from Burleigh to-night."

The colonel turned away, and, beckoning to his staff officer to join us, stumped onward to the gar-

rison. The prolonged wail of the bugle, aided by the rising night wind, sent the solemn strains of taps sailing down the dimly-lighted valley, and with staring eyes old Folsom stood gazing after the departing officers, then whirled about toward the tents. There in front of Dean stood Pappoose, her hands clasped lightly over the hilt of the saber the "striker" had leaned against the lid of the mess chest but a moment before, her lovely face smiling up into the owner's.

"You'll come back by way of Hal's, won't you?" she was blithely saying. "Perhaps I can coax father to take us there to meet you."

"By heaven, Burleigh," muttered the old trader to himself, "are you the deepest man I ever met, or only the most infernal scoundrel?"

CHAPTER XV.

A SLEEPLESS night had old John Folsom, and with the sun he was up again and hurriedly dressing. Noiseless as he strove to be he was discovered, for as he issued from his room into the dim light of the upper hall there stood Pappoose.

"Poor Jess has been awake an hour," said she. "We've been trying to see the troop through the glass. They must have started before daybreak, for there's nothing on the road to Frayne."

"It disappears over the divide three miles out," he answered vaguely, and conscious that her clear eyes were studying his face. "I didn't sleep well either. We shall be having news from Hal to-day, and the mail rider comes down from Frayne."

She had thrown about her a long, loose wrapper, and her lustrous hair tumbled like a brown-black torrent down over her shoulders and back. Steadfastly the brown eyes followed his every move.

"It is hours to breakfast time, Daddy dear; let me make you some coffee before you go out."

"What? Who said I was going out?" he asked, forcing a smile; then, more gravely: "I'll be back in thirty minutes, dear, but wait a moment I cannot. I want to catch a man before he can possibly ride away."

He bent and kissed her hurriedly, and went briskly down the stairs. In the lower hall he suddenly struck a parlor match that flared up and illumined the winding staircase to the third story. Some thought as sudden prompted her to glance aloft just in time to catch a glimpse of a woman's face withdrawing swiftly over the balcony rail. In her hatred of anything that savored of spying the girl could have called aloud a demand to know what Mrs. Fletcher wanted, but strange things were in the wind, as she was learning, and something whispered silence. Slowly she returned to Jessie's side, and together once more they searched with the glasses the distant trail that, distinctly visible now in the slant of the morning sun, twisted up the northward slopes on the winding way to Frayne. Not a whiff of dust could they see.

Meantime John Folsom strode swiftly down the well-known path to the quartermaster's depot, a tumult of suspicion and conjecture whirling in his brain. As he walked he recalled the many hints and stories that had come to his ears of Burleigh's

antecedents elsewhere and his associations here. With all his reputation for enterprise and wealth, there were "shady" tales of gambling transactions and salted mines and watered stocks that attached perhaps more directly to the men with whom he foregathered than to him. "A man is known by the company he keeps," said Folsom, and Burleigh's cronies, until Folsom came to settle in Gate City, had been almost exclusively among the "sharps," gamblers, and their kindred, the projectors and prospectors ever preying on the unwary on the outer wave of progress. Within the past six months he had seen much of him, for Burleigh was full of business enterprises, had large investments everywhere, was lavish in invitation and suggestion, was profuse in offers of aid of any kind if aid were wanted. He had gone so far as to say that he knew from experience how with his wealth tied up in real estate and mines a man often found himself in need of a few thousands in spot cash, and as Folsom was buying and building, if at any time he found himself a little short and needed ten or twenty thousand say, why, Burleigh's bank account was at his service, etc. It all sounded large and liberal, and Folsom, whose lot for years had been cast with a somewhat threadbare array of army people, content with little, impecunious but honest, he wondered

what manner of martial man this was. Burleigh did not loudly boast of his wealth and influence, but impressed in some ponderous way his hearers with a sense of both. Yet, ever since that run to Warrior Gap, a change had come over Burleigh. He talked more of mines and money and showed less, and now, only yesterday, when the old man's heart had mellowed to him because he had first held him wholly to blame for Dean's arrest and later found him pleading for the young fellow's release, a strange thing had happened. Burleigh confided to him that he had a simply fabulous opportunity—a chance to buy out a mine that experts secretly told him was what years later he would have called a "bonanza," but that in the late sixties was locally known as a "Shanghai." Twenty-five thousand dollars would do the trick, but his money was tied up. Would Folsom go in with him, put up twelve thousand five hundred, and Burleigh would do the rest? Folsom had been bitten by too many mines that yielded only rattlesnakes, and he couldn't be lured. Then, said Burleigh, wouldn't Folsom go on his note, so that he could borrow at the bank? Folsom seldom went on anybody's note. It was as bad as mining. He begged off, and left Burleigh disappointed, but not disconcerted. "I can raise it without trouble," said he, "but it may take forty-

eight hours to get the cash here, and I thought you would be glad to be let in on the ground floor."

"I've been let in to too many floors, major," said he. "You'll have to excuse me." And so Burleigh, with his Louisiana captain, had driven off to the fort, where Newhall asked for Griggs and was importunate, nor did Griggs's whisky, freely tendered to all comers of the commissioned class, tend to assuage his desire. Back had they gone to town, and then came the cataclysm of noon.

In broad daylight, at his official desk, in the presence and hearing of officers, civilians and enlisted men, as the soldier lawyers would have it, a staff official of high rank had been cowhided by a cavalry subaltern, and that subaltern, of all others, the only brother of Folsom's fair guest, Jessie Dean—the boy who had saved the lives of Folsom's son and his son's imperiled household, and had thereby endeared himself to him as had no other young soldier in the service. And now, what fate was staring him in the face? Released from arrest but a day or so before upon the appeal of the officer whom he had so soon thereafter violently assaulted, Marshall Dean had committed one of the gravest crimes against the provisions of the Mutiny Act. Without warrant or excuse he had struck, threatened, assaulted, etc., a superior officer, who was in the discharge of his duty at the

time. No matter what the provocation—and in this case it would be held grossly inadequate—there could be only one sentence—summary dismissal from the army. Just as sure as shooting, if Burleigh preferred charges that boy was ruined.

And for mortal hours that afternoon it looked as though nothing could hold Burleigh's hand. The man was livid with wrath. First he would have the youngster's blood, and then he'd dismiss him. Folsom pointed out that he couldn't well do both, and by two o'clock it simmered down to a demand for instant court-martial. Burleigh wrote a furious telegram to Omaha. He had been murderously assaulted in his office by Lieutenant Dean. He demanded his immediate arrest and trial. Folsom pleaded with him to withhold it. Every possible *amende* would be made, but no! Indeed, not until nearly four o'clock could Folsom succeed in the last resort at his disposal. At that hour he had lent the quartermaster fifteen thousand dollars on his unindorsed note of hand, on condition that no proceedings whatever should be taken against Mr. Dean, Folsom guaranteeing that every *amende* should be made that fair arbitration could possibly dictate. He had even gone alone to the bank and brought the cash on Burleigh's representation that it might hurt his credit to appear as a borrower. He had

even pledged his word that the transaction should be kept between themselves.

And then there had been a scene with that drunken wretch Newhall. What possible hold had he on Burleigh that he should be allowed to come reeling and storming into the office and demanding money and lots of money—this, too, in the presence of total strangers? And Burleigh had actually paid him then and there some hundreds of dollars, to the stupefaction of the fellow—who had come for a row. They got him away somehow, glad to go, possibly, with his unexpected wealth, and Burleigh had explained that that poor devil, when he could be persuaded to swear off, was one of the bravest and most efficient officers in the service, that he was well to do, only his money, too, was tied up in mines; but what was of more account than anything else, he had devotedly and at risk of his own life from infection nursed his brother officer Burleigh through the awful epidemic of yellow fever in New Orleans in '67. He had saved Burleigh's life, "so how can I go back on him now," said he.

All this was the old trader revolving in mind as he hastened to the depot, all this and more. For two days Marshall Dean and "C" troop had stood ready for special service. Rumor had it that the old general himself had determined to take the

field and was on his way to Gate City. It was possibly to escort him and his staff the troop was ordered kept prepared to move at a moment's notice. On Burleigh's desk was a batch of telegrams from Department Headquarters. Two came in during their long conference in the afternoon, and the quartermaster had lowered his hand long enough from that lurid welt on his sallow cheek to hurriedly write two or three in reply. One Folsom felt sure was sent in cipher. Two days before, Burleigh had urged him to protest as vehemently as he could against the sending of any money or any small detachment up to the Big Horn, and protested he had strenuously. Two days before, Burleigh said it was as bad as murder to order a paymaster or disbursing officer to the Hills with anything less than a battalion to escort him, and yet within four hours after he was put in possession of nearly all the paper currency in the local bank a secret order was issued sending Lieutenant Dean with ten picked men to slip through the passes to the Platte, away from the beaten road, and up to ten P.M. Dean himself was kept in ignorance of his further destination or the purpose of his going. Not until half-past ten was a sealed package placed in his hands by the post quartermaster, who had himself received it from Major Burleigh, and then

and there the young officer was bidden by Colonel Stevens, as the medium of the department commander, to ride with all haste commensurate with caution, to ford the Sweetwater above its junction with the Platte, to travel by night if need be and hide by day if he could, to let no man or woman know the purpose of his going or the destination of his journey, but to land that package safe at Warrior Gap before the moon should wane.

And all this Burleigh must have known when he, John Folsom, shook his hand at parting after tea that evening, and had then gone hopefully to drive his girls to Emory to see his soldier boy, and found him busy with the sudden orders, received not ten minutes before their coming. Something in Burleigh's almost tremulous anxiety to get that money in the morning, his ill-disguised chagrin at Folsom's refusal, something in the eagerness with which, despite the furious denunciation of the moment before, he jumped at Folsom's offer to put up the needed money if he would withhold the threatened charges —all came back to the veteran now and had continued to keep him thinking during the night. Could it be that Burleigh stood in need of all this money to cover other sums that he had misapplied? Could it be that he had planned this sudden sending of young Dean on a desperate mission in revenge that

he could not take officially? There were troops at Frayne going forward in strong force within the week. There were other officers within call, a dozen of them, who had done nowhere near the amount of field service performed by Dean. He, a troop commander just in from long and toilsome marches and from perilous duty, had practically been relieved from the command of his troop, told to take ten men and run the gauntlet through the swarming Sioux. The more Folsom thought the more he believed that he had grave reason for his suspicion, and reason equally grave for calling on the quartermaster for explanation. He reached the corral gate. It was locked, but a little postern in the stockade let him through. One or two sleepy hands appeared about the stables, but the office was deserted. Straight to Burleigh's quarters he went and banged at the door. It took three bangs to bring a servant.

"I wish to see your master at once. Tell him I am here," and as the servant slowly shambled up the stairs, Folsom entered the sitting-room. A desk near the window was open and its contents littered about. The drawers in a heavy bookcase were open and papers were strewn upon the floor. The folding doors to the dining-room were open. Decanters, goblets, cigar stumps and heel taps were

scattered over the table. Guest or host, or both, had left things in riotous shape. Then down came the servant, a scared look in his eyes.

"The major isn't in, sir. His bed hasn't been occupied, an' the captain's gone, too. Their uniforms are there, though."

Five minutes later, on a borrowed horse, John Folsom was galloping like mad for home. A door in the high board fence at the rear of his house shot open just as he was darting through the lane that led to the stable. A woman's form appeared in the gap—the last thing that he saw for a dozen hours, for the horse shied violently, hurling the rider headlong to the ground.

CHAPTER XVI.

At three o'clock in the morning, while the stars were still bright in the eastern sky, the little party of troopers, Dean at the irhead, had ridden away from the twinkling lights of camp, and long before sunrise had crossed the first divide to the north, and alternating trot, lope and walk had put miles between them and Fort Emory before the drums of the infantry beat the call for guard mounting.

At ten o'clock the party halted under some spreading willows, deep in a cleft of the bold, high hills that rolled away toward the Sweetwater valley. Horses were unsaddled and picketed out to graze. A little cook fire was started close to the spring that fed the tiny brook, trickling away down the narrow ravine, and in a few moments the aroma of coffee and of appetizing slices of bacon greeted the welcoming nostrils of the hungry men. The sun that had risen clear and dazzling was now obscured by heavy masses of clouds, and time and again Dean cast anxious eyes aloft, for a storm seemed sweeping eastward from the distant Wahsatch

range, and long before the little command had dived downward from the heights into the depths of this wild, romantic and contracted valley, all the rolling upland toward Green River, far to the west, lay under the pall of heavy and forbidding banks of hurrying vapor. Coffee and breakfast finished, Dean climbed the steep bluff overhanging the spring, a faithful sergeant following, and what he saw was sufficient to determine immediate action.

"Saddle up. We'll push ahead at once."

For an instant the veteran trooper looked dissent, but discipline prevailed.

"The lieutenant knows that Carey's not in yet," he ventured to say, as he started back down the narrow game trail which they had climbed.

"Yes; but yonder he comes and so does the storm. We can't be caught in this cañon in case of a hard rain. Let Carey have some coffee and a bite, if he feels well enough. Then we'll push on."

Ordinarily when making summer marches over the range, the first "water camp" on the Sweetwater trail was here at Cañon Springs. On the road to Frayne, which crossed the brook ten miles to the east, all wagon trains and troops not on forced march made similar camp. In the case of scouting detachments or little parties sent out from Emory, it was always customary to spend the first

night and make the first camp on the Box Elder at furthermost, then to push on, ready and refreshed, the following day. Dean well knew that to get the best work out of his horses he should start easily, and up to nine o'clock he had fully intended to make the usual camp at the Springs. But once before, within a few years, a big scouting party camping in the gorge of the Box Elder had been surprised by one of those sudden, sweeping storms, and before they could strike tents, pack up and move to higher ground, the stream took matters into its own hands and spared them all further trouble on that score, distributing camp and garrison equipage for long leagues away to the east. Two miles back, trooper Carey, who had been complaining of severe cramp and pain in the stomach, begged to be allowed to fall out and rest awhile. He was a reliable old soldier when whisky was not winning the upper hand, and this time whisky was not at fault. A dose of Jamaica ginger was the only thing their field pharmacopœia provided, and Carey rolled out of his saddle and doubled up among the rocks with his hands on the pit of his stomach, grimacing.

"Go back if you think best, or come ahead and catch us at the Springs if well enough," were the orders left him, while the men pushed on, and now, as the lieutenant said, Carey was coming himself.

Some of the party were already dozing when the sergeant's sharp order "Saddle up" was given, but a glance at the lowering sky explained it all, and every man was standing to horse and ready when the missing trooper came jogging in among them, white, peaked, but determined. A look of mingled disappointment and relief appeared on his face as he saw the preparations for the start, but his only comment was, "I can make it, sir," as he saluted his young commander. Less than two hours from the time they unsaddled, therefore, the troopers once more mounted, and, following their leader, filed away down the winding gorge. Presently there came the low rumble of thunder, and a sweep of the rising wind. "Trot," said Dean, and without other word the little column quickened the pace.

The ravine grew wider soon and far less tortuous, but was still a narrow and dangerous spot. For a mile or two from the Springs its course was nearly east of north, then it bore away to the northeast, and the Sweetwater trail abruptly left it and went winding up a cleft in the hills to the west. Just as they reached this point the heavens opened and the clouds descended in a deluge of rain. Out came the ponchos, unstrapped from the saddle, and every man's head popped through the slit as the shiny black "shedwater" settled down on his shoulders.

"That outfit behind us will get a soaking if it has been fool enough to follow down to the Springs," said Carey to the sergeant, as they began the pull up the slippery trail.

"What outfit?" asked Dean, turning in the saddle and looking back in surprise.

A blinding flash of lightning, followed almost on the instant by the crack and roar of thunder, put summary stop to talk of any kind. Men and horses bowed their heads before the deluge and the rain ran in streams from the manes and tails. The ascending path turned quickly into a running brook and the black forms of steeds and riders struggled sidewise up the grass-grown slopes in search of higher ground. The heavens had turned inky black. The gloomy ravine grew dark as night. Flash after flash the lightning split the gloom. Every second or two trooper faces gleamed ghastly in the dazzling glare, then as suddenly vanished. Horses slipped or stumbled painfully and, man after man, the riders followed the example of the young soldier in the lead and, dismounting, led their dripping beasts farther up the steep incline. Halfway to the summit, peering through the wind-swept sheets of rain, a palisaded clump of rocks jutted out from the heights and, after a hard climb, the little band found partial shelter from the driving storm,

and huddled, awe-stricken, at their base. Still the lightning played and the thunder cannonaded with awful resonance from crag to crag down the deep gorge from which they had clambered, evidently none too soon, for presently, far down the black depths, they could see the Box Elder, under a white wreath of foam, tearing in fury down its narrow bed.

"Beg pardon, lieutenant," shouted the veteran sergeant in the young commander's ear, even in that moment never forgetting the habitual salute, "but if I didn't see the reason for that sudden order to saddle I more than see it now. We would have been drowned like rats down there in the gulch."

"I'm wondering if anybody *has* drowned like rats," shouted Dean, in reply. "Carey says another party was just behind us. Who could they be?"

But for answer came another vivid, dazzling flash that for an instant blinded all eyes. "By God! but that's a stunner!" gasped a big trooper, and then followed the deafening bang and crash of the thunder, and its echoes went booming and reverberating from earth to heaven and rolling away, peal after peal, down the bluff-bound cañon. For a moment no other sound could be heard; then, as it died away and the rain came swashing down in fresh deluge, Carey's voice overmastered the storm.

"That's struck something, sir, right around yonder by the Springs. God help that outfit that came a-gallopin' after me!"

"What was it? Which way were they coming?" Dean managed to ask.

"Right along the bluff, sir, to the east. Seemed like they was ridin' over from the old camp on the Frayne road. There was twenty-five or thirty of 'em, I should say, coming at a lope."

"Cavalry?" asked Dean, a queer look in his face.

"No, sir. They rode dispersed like. They was a mile away when I sighted them, and it was gittin' so black then I don't think they saw me at all. They were 'bout off yonder, half a mile east of the Springs when I dipped down into the ravine, and what seemed queer was that two of them galloped to the edge, dismounted, and were peering down into the gorge like so many Indians, just as though they didn't want to be seen. I was goin' to tell the lieutenant 'bout it first thing if I had found our fellows off their guard, but you were all mounted and just starting.''

Instinctively Dean put forth his hand under the dripping poncho and tugged at the straps of his off saddle-bag. No need for dread on that score. The bulky package, wrapped, sealed and corded, was

bulging out of the side of his field pouch till it looked as though he had crammed a cavalry boot into its maw.

"Thirty men—mounted?—no wagons or—anything?" he anxiously asked.

"Full thirty, sir, and every man armed with rifle as far as I could see," said Carey, "and if it was us they was after, they'd have had us at their mercy down in that pocket at the Springs."

A shout from one of the men attracted the attention of the leaders. The storm had spent its force and gone rolling away eastward. The thunder was rumbling far over toward the now invisible crest of the Black Hills of Wyoming. The rain sheets had given place to trickling downpour. A dim light was stealing into the blackness of the gorge. Louder and fiercer roared the Box Elder, lashing its banks with foam. And then came the cry again.

"I tell you it is, by God! for there goes another!"

All eyes followed the direction of the pointing finger. All eyes saw, even though dimly, the saddled form of a horse plunging and struggling in the flood, making vain effort to clamber out, then whirling helplessly away—swept out of sight around the shoulder of bluff, and borne on down the tossing waves of the torrent. Men mean no irreverence

when they call upon their Maker at such times, even in soldier oath. It is awe, not blasphemy.

"By God, lieutenant, that's what we'd a been doing but for your order." It was the sergeant who spoke.

And at that very hour there was excitement at Fort Emory. At eight o'clock the colonel was on his piazza looking with gloomy eyes over the distant rows of empty barracks. The drum-major with the band at his heels came stalking out over the grassy parade, and the post adjutant, girt with sash and sword-belt, stood in front of his office awaiting the sergeant-major, who was unaccountably delayed. Reduced to a shadow, the garrison at Fort Emory might reasonably have been excused, by this time, from the ceremony of mounting a guard, consisting practically of ten privates, three of whom wore the cavalry jacket; but old "Pecksniff" was determined to keep up some show of state. He could have no parade or review, but at least he could require his guard to be mounted with all the pomp and ceremony possible. He would have ordered his officers out in epaulets and the full dress "Kossuth" hat of the period, but epaulets had been discarded during the war and not yet resumed on the far frontier. So the rank and file alone were called upon to appear in the black-feathered oddity a misguided staff had

designed as the headgear of the army. "Pecksniff's" half-dozen doughboys, therefore, with their attendant sergeants and corporals in the old fashioned frock and felt, and a still smaller squad of troopers in yellow-trimmed jackets and brass-mounted forage caps, were drawn up at the edge of the parade awaiting the further signal of adjutant's call, while the adjutant himself swore savagely and sent the orderly on the run for the sergeant-major. When that clock-governed functionary was missing something indeed must be going wrong.

Presently the orderly came running back.

"Sergeant Dineen isn't home, sir, and his wife says he hasn't been back since the lieutenant sent him in town with the last dispatch."

"Tell the first sergeant of "B" Company, then, to act as sergeant-major at once," said the adjutant, and hurried over to his colonel. "Dineen's not back, sir," he reported at the gate. "Can anything be wrong?"

"I ordered him to bring with him the answer to my dispatch to the general, who wired to me from the railway depot at Cheyenne. Probably he's been waiting for that, and the general's away somewhere. We ought to have an operator here day and night," said Pecksniff petulantly. But the irritation in his eyes gave way to anxiety when at

that moment the sutler's buggy was seen dashing into the garrison at headlong speed, his smart trotter urged almost to a run. Griggs reined up with no little hard pulling at the colonel's gate, and they could see a dozen yards off that his face was pale.

"Have you any idea, colonel," he began the moment the officers reached him, "where Major Burleigh can be? He left the depot somewhere about three o'clock this morning with that Captain Newhall. He hasn't returned and can't be found. Your sergeant-major was waylaid and robbed some time after midnight, and John Folsom was picked up senseless in the alley back of his house two hours ago. What does it all mean?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THAT storm-burst along the range had turned for twenty-four hours every mountain stream into a foaming torrent for a hundred miles. Not a bridge remained along the Platte. Not a ford was fordable within two days' march of either Emory or Frayne. Not a courier crossed the Box Elder, going either way, until the flood went down, and then it transpired that a tide in the affairs of men had also turned, and that there was trouble ahead for some who had thought to find plain sailing. For two days watchers along the lower Box Elder dragged out upon the shallows the bodies of horses that once upon a time might have borne the "U. S." brand, but were not girthed with cavalry saddles now. Nor were there lacking other bodies to prove that the victims of the sudden storm were not Uncle Sam's men, much as two, at least, of the drowned had been wanted by Federal authorities but a week before. What the denizens of Gate City and Fort Emory dreaded and expected to hear was that Dean

and his little party had been caught in the trap. But, living or dead, not a sign of them remained along the storm-swept ravine. What most people of Gate City and Fort Emory could not understand was the evidence that a big gang of horse thieves, desperadoes and renegades had suddenly appeared about the new town, had spurred away northward in the night, had kept the Frayne road till they reached the Box Elder, riding hard long after sun-up, and there, reinforced, they had gone westward to the Sweetwater trail, and, old frontiersmen though they were, had been caught in the whirl of water at Cañon Springs, losing two of their number and at least a dozen of their horses. What could have lured them into that gloomy rift at such a time? What inspiration had led Dean out of it?

Singly or in little squads, many of them afoot, bedraggled, silent, chagrined, the "outfit," described by Trooper Carey had slunk away from the neighborhood of the Box Elder as soon as the storm subsided. Solemnly, as befitted soldiers, silent and and alert despite their dripping accoutrements, the little detachment of cavalry had pushed ahead, riding by compass over the drenched uplands, steering for the Sweetwater. Late in the afternoon the skies had cleared, the sun came out, and they camped in a bunch of cottonwoods

on the old Casper trail and slept the sleep of the just and the weary. Early next day they hastened on, reaching the usually shallow stream, with Devil's Gate only a few miles away, before the setting of a second sun. Here they feasted and rested well, and before the dawn was fairly red on the third day out from Emory they were breasting the turbid waters and by noon had left the valley far to the south and were well out toward the Big Horn country, where it behooved them to look warily ahead, for from every ridge, though far to the west of their probable raiding ground, Dean and his men could expect to encounter scouting parties of the Indians at any moment, and one false step meant death.

The third night passed without alarm, though every eye and ear was strained. The morning of the fourth day dawned and the sun soon tinged the misty mountain tops to the far north, and Dean saw before him an open rolling country, over which it would be impossible to march without attracting Indian eyes, if Indian eyes there were within twenty miles. And with proper caution he ordered his men to keep in concealment, horses grazing under guard in a deep depression near a stream, men dozing soundly by turns until the twilight came, and then the stars—their night lights for a long,

long march. Dawn of the fifth day found them huddled in a deep ravine of the southern foothills, with Warrior Gap not thirty miles away, and now, indeed, was prudence necessary, for the faint light showed the fresh prints of innumerable pony hoofs on every side. They were close on Machpealota's lurking braves. Which would see the other first?

It must have been somewhere toward five o'clock in the afternoon that Dean, searching with his field glass the sunlit slopes far out to the east, heard the voice of his sergeant close at hand and turned to answer. Up to this moment, beyond the pony tracks, not a sign had they seen of hostile Indians, but the buffalo that had appeared in scattered herds along their line of march were shy and scary, and old hands said that that meant they had recently been hunted hard. Moreover, this was not a section favored of the buffalo. There was much alkali and sage brush along their trail, and only here and there in scanty patches any of the rich, nutritious bunch grass which the roving animals so eagerly sought. The day had been hot and almost cloudless. The shimmer of heat along the lazy roll of the land to the south had often baffled their blinking eyes. But now the sun was well to the west, and the refraction seemed diminishing, and away over to the northeast a dull-colored cloud

seemed slowly rising beyond the ridges. It was this that Sergeant Bruce was studying when he murmured to his young commander:

"I think that means a big herd on the run, sir, and if so Indians started them."

One or two troopers, dozing close at hand, sprawled full length upon the ground, with their faces buried in, or hidden by, their blue-sleeved arms, slowly rolled over and came crouching up alongside. Dean dropped his glasses and peered in the direction indicated by his comrade of humbler rank. Dust cloud it was beyond a doubt, and a long peep through the binocular proved that it was slowly sailing across the horizon in a northerly direction. Did that mean that the red hunters were driving the great quarry toward the village of the Sioux, or that the young men were out in force, and with the full complement of squaws and ponies, were slaughtering on the run. If the former, then Dean and his party would be wise to turn eastward and cross the trail of the chase. If the latter they would stand better chance of slipping through to the Gap by pushing northward, deeper in among the pine-crested heights.

Behind the watchers, well down in the ravine, the horses were placidly nibbling at the scant herbage, or lazily sprawling in the sun, each animal securely

hoppled, and all carefully guarded by the single trooper, whose own mount, ready saddled, circled within the limits of the stout lariat, looped about his master's wrist. All spoke of caution, of lively sense of danger and responsibility, for they of the little detachment were picked men, who had ridden the warpath too long not to realize that there was no such thing as trusting to luck in the heart of the Indian country, especially when Machpealota with his Ogallalla braves was out for business. The cautious movements of the group along the bank had quickly been noted by the wakeful ones among the troopers, and presently the entire party, excepting only the herd guard, had crouched up alongside, and with the comradeship born of such perilous service, were now discussing the situation in low, confidential tones.

For half an hour they lay there, studying the signs to the northeast. The dun colored cloud hung low over the earth for a distance of several miles. The herd was evidently one of unusual size even for those days when the buffalo swarmed in countless thousands, and finally the sergeant spoke again.

"It's a big hunt, lieutenant. Whatever may be going on about the Gap they've found time to send out young men enough to round up most of the buffalo north of the Platte and drive them in

toward the mountains. It's combining pleasure with business. They don't feel strong enough in number, perhaps, to make another attempt on troops armed with breech-loaders, so while they're waiting until their reinforcements come, or their own breech-loaders, they are herding the buffalo where they can get them when they want them later on. We are in big luck that no stragglers are anywhere around us; if they were it wouldn't take such fellows long to spy us out."

Dean swept the ridge line with his glass. No sign of life nearer than that far-away, betraying dust cloud. No symptom of danger anywhere within their ken. He was thinking at the moment of that precious package in his saddle-bags and the colonel's words impressing him with the sense of responsibility the night they parted at Fort Emory. To-morrow, by sunrise, if fortune favored him, he could turn it over to the commanding officer at the new stockade, and then if the Indians were not gathered in force about the post and actually hostile, he could slip out again at night and make swift dash for the Platte and the homeward way, and then within the week rejoin his sister at Fort Emory —his sister and "Pappoose." Never before had the Indian pet name carried such significance as now. Night and day those soft, dark eyes—that

beautiful face—haunted his thoughts and filled his young heart with new and passionate longing. It was hard to have to leave the spot her presence made enchanted ground. Nothing but the spur of duty, the thrill of soldier achievement and stirring venture could have reconciled him to that unwelcome order.

In one week now, if fortune favored and heaven spared, he could hope to look again into the eyes that had so enchained him, but if there should interpose the sterner lot of the frontier, if the Sioux should learn of his presence, he who had thwarted Burning Star and the brothers of poor Lizette in their schemes of vengeance, he at whose door the Ogallallas must by this time have laid the death of one of their foremost braves, then indeed would there be no hope of getting back without a battle royal. There was only one chance of safety—that the Indians should not discover their presence. If they did and realized who the intruders were, Jessie Dean might look in vain for her brother's return. Pappoose would never hear the love words that, trembling on his lips the night he left her, had been poured out only to that unresponsive picture. Two ways there were in which the Indians could know of his presence. One by being informed through some half-breed spy, lurking about Frayne;

but then who would be dastard enough to send such word? The other by being seen and recognized by some of the Ogallalla band, and thus far he believed they had come undetected, and it was now after five o'clock—after five o'clock and all was well. In a few hours they could again be on their starlit way. With the morrow they should be safely within the gates of the new stockade at Warrior Gap.

Turning with hope and relief in his face to speak to Sergeant Bruce, who lay there at his elbow, he saw the blue-sleeved arm stretching forth in warning to lie low, and with grave eyes the veteran was gazing straight at a little butte that rose from the rolling surface not more than half a mile away to the southeast.

"Lieutenant," he whispered, "there are Indians back of that hill at this minute, and it isn't buffalo they're laying for."

Dean was brave. He had been tried and his mettle was assured, and yet he felt the sudden chill that coursed his veins. "How can they have seen us," he murmured.

"May have struck our trail out to the southwest," said Bruce slowly, "or they may have been told of our coming and are stalking us. They've got a heavy score to settle with this troop, you know."

For a moment only the breathing of the little party could be heard. All eyes were fixed upon the distant mound. At last Dean spoke again.

"When did you see them first and how many are there?"

"Near ten minutes ago. I saw something fluttering swift along the sky line just beyond that divide to the south. It skimmed like a bird, all but the quick bobbing up and down that made me sure there was a galloping pony under it. Then another skimmed along. It was the bunch of feathers and red flannel on their lances, and my belief is that they struck our trail back here somewhere, and that there's only a small party, and they don't know just who we are and they want to find out."

"You're right. Look!" was Dean's sudden answer, for at the very instant there rode boldly, calmly into full view two young Indians, who with cool deliberation came jogging on at gentle speed, straight toward the concealed bivouac of the troopers. Instantly Bruce reached for his carbine, and two or three of the men went sliding or crouching backward down the slope as though in quest of their arms. Full eight hundred yards away were the riders at the moment, coming side by side in apparent unconcern.

"Don't," muttered Dean, with hand outstretched. "They look anything but hostile."

"That's when they're most likely to be full of hell, sir," was the prompt answer. "See! others are watching behind that knoll," and indeed as Bruce declared, a feather-decked head or two could be detected through the glass, peering over the summit.

"Warn them to halt, then," cried Dean. "But we cannot fire unless they provoke it."

Bruce was on his feet in a second. Standing erect and facing straight toward the coming pair, he raised his right hand, palm to the front, to the full length of his arm, and slowly motioned "stand." Every plainsman knows the signal. In well-acted surprise, the Indians reined their ponies flat back, and, shading their eyes with their hands a moment, remained motionless. Then, as with one accord, each tossed aside his rifle, and one of them further lifted high and displayed a revolver. This, too, he tossed out on the turf, and now with both arms bare and extended on high, with empty hands outspread, they slowly advanced as though saying "See, we are without arms. We come as brothers."

But the sergeant never hesitated. Almost on tiptoe he repeated the signal "halt," and half-turned imploringly to his officer.

"It s all a bluff, sir. They want to crawl upon us, see who and how many we are. Let some of us fire warning shots or come they will, and the moment they find out who we are, away they'll ride to bring Red Cloud and all his bucks about our ears."

"I cannot fire," was the answer. "That's their flag of truce and we must not ignore it. Let them come, sergeant; I'll meet them."

CHAPTER XVIII.

Remonstrance on part of his men would have been a violation of their rules of order. Obedient to the lieutenant's instructions, Sergeant Bruce, with evident reluctance, lowered his hand. Whoever these Indians were they well understood the principles that governed civilized warfare. They well knew that the white soldiers would respect a flag of truce, though in their own vernacular they referred to the sacred emblem only as a "fool flag," and sometimes used it, as did the Modocs five years later, to lure officers into ambush and deliberately murder them. They knew the white soldiers would take no advantage of foemen gathered for a conference or parley, and thus far the Sioux themselves had observed the custom which the Modocs basely violated when in cold blood they slaughtered General Canby and the peace commissioners sent to treat with them. Confidently, therefore, came the two young warriors, but as Dean raised himself

from the ground and was about to step forward, the sergeant spoke:

"Beg pardon, sir, but these fellows know all our officers. They would recognize you at once. The word would go to Red Cloud faster than any pony could gallop. Let me meet them, or let one of the men."

The ponies were coming at the lope now, and not an instant was to be lost. The safety of his command might possibly depend on their not being recognized as of the troop before whose carbines Chaska, brother to Lizette, had met his death.

"Perhaps you're right," said Dean. "Halt them again. Conroy, you go with Sergeant Bruce."

Eagerly a young trooper, carbine in hand, sprang up and stood by the sergeant's side as the latter repeated his warning signal. Obediently, yet not too promptly, showing evident desire to get where they could peer over into the ravine and count the number of the white men and horses, the Indians again drew rein, this time barely one hundred yards away. Then Bruce and Conroy, holding up their emptied hands, strode forward along the grassy slope, making the further sign, "Dismount."

In those days few of our cavalry wore, when on Indian campaign, the forage-cap with its crossed sabres and distinguishing letters. Nothing in the

dress or accoutrements of the two men thus advancing to meet the Indian emissaries would give to the latter any clew as to the troop or regiment to which they belonged. Could they see the horses, however, the matter would be settled at once. The U. S. brand, with that of the number of the regiment and letter of the troop showed on every cavalry mount in the service, and the Ogallallas knew the earmarks of two, at least, of our cavalry regiments in '68 as well as they did the cut of their own hair. But in the modesty of the non-commissioned officer Bruce had underrated his own prominence in Indian eyes. Not only did these keen observers know every officer by sight, and have for him some distinguishing name of their own, but many a trooper, easily singled out from his fellows because of his stature, or the color of his hair, or some other physical peculiarity, was as well known as his captain or lieutenant, and Bruce, ex-trooper of the Scots Greys, and now a model sergeant of Yankee cavalry, was already a marked man in the eyes of the southern Sioux. Brulé, Minneconjou and Ogallalla knew him well—his aquiline beak, to which the men would sometimes slyly allude, having won him the Indian appellative of Posh Kopee or Big Nose.

Before the two parties came within fifty yards of

each other, therefore, watchers along the ravine saw the quick exchange of significant glances between the young braves. "Twig that?" whispered Trooper Blaine, in low, emphatic tone. "Those fellows know 'Scotty' just as well as we do."

All the same, leaving their trained ponies to nibble at the scanty bunch grass, the two came straight forward with extended hands and cordial "How, colah!" on their lips, one of them adding, in agency English, "Want talk chief. Indian poor. Heap sick." (And here he clasped his stomach with both hands.) "Want coffee, sugar, bread."

"All right," said Bruce promptly, noting the while how the roving black eyes searched the edge of the ravine. "Stay here. Don't come nearer. You got buffalo meat?"

A grunt was the reply of one, a guttural "Buffalo, yes," the answer of the other.

"Bring tongues, then," and Bruce touched his own. "Five," and he threw forward the outspread right hand, rapidly touching in succession the thumb and four fingers. "We give both hands full —coffee, sugar, hardtack," and Bruce illustrated as he spoke. "That's all!" he finished abruptly, with the well-known Indian sign that plainly tells "I have spoken—there is nothing more to say," then

calmly turned his back and, bidding Conroy follow, started to return to his comrades at the ravine.

But Indian diplomacy was unsatisfied. The Sioux had found "Big Nose" to be one of the soldiers in the field. He, at least, was of the hated troop that fought and chased Burning Star and killed Chaska. The trail told them there were nearly a dozen in the party, all on shod horses, with two in lead—spare mounts or pack-horses, doubtless—so they had extra rations and had come far; but why were they going this way, so far west of the usual road to the Big Horn posts? Why were they so few in number? Where were the rest? Why were they hiding here in the ravine, instead of marching? Answer to this last question was easy enough. It was to keep out of sight of Indian eyes and needed no excuse. There was something behind this mysterious presence of ten or twelve soldiers in the southern foothills, and Machpealota would expect of his scouts full information, hence the instant movement on the part of one of the two braves to follow.

Impressively, Bruce turned again and waved him back. "Go, get buffalo tongue," said he, "or no trade. Keep away from our tepees," and he drew with his spurred boot-heel a jagged line across the turf. "Your side," said he, indicating the slope to

the southeast of the line. "This—ours. That's all!" And this time the Indian knew he must come no nearer.

"I've got 'em talking trade, lieutenant," reported Bruce, the instant he reached Dean's side. "We don't need the tongues, but we've got more coffee and sugar than we are apt to want, and at least we can keep them interested until dark, then we can slip away. Of course, they've sent word to their main body that we're over here, but I believe they can't come in force before night."

"They knew you, sergeant, and they know it is probably our troop," said he. "There must be only a small party near us. Make your trade, but while you're doing it we'll saddle. I mean to get out of this and into the thick of the timber before they can surround us. Stand 'em off, now, while we get ready."

Promises must be kept when made to an Indian, even if they are otherwise sometimes broken. In ten minutes, with coffee, sugar and hardtack in their hands, the sergeant and his comrades were back at the front. One brave was still there, the other had vanished. Five minutes, neither party saying a word, the troopers waited; then Bruce turned to Conroy. "I knew they had nothing to trade. Take this sack with you and fall back. Tell

our fellows to keep me well covered till I follow." The instant the soldier started with the sack swung over his shoulder, the Indian, who had been squatted on the turf, sprang up and began rapid expostulation in fluent Ogallalla. "It's no use, young man," interposed Bruce. "Your chum there has no buffalo tongues, and he knew it. Here's some hardtack for you," and he spread one liberally with sugar and handed it to the ever-receptive paw, outstretched to grasp it. A glance over the shoulder showed that Conroy was nearly at the edge. Then, quietly, Bruce, too, began to retire. He had not got ten paces, still facing his unwelcome visitor, when the Indian gave a shrill, sudden cry and tossed up his hands. Not a second too soon Bruce turned and darted for cover. The Indian flung himself flat on the turf and rolled away into a depression where he could find partial shelter from bullets from the ravine, whence he evidently looked for them, and out from behind the knoll, bridles held high, "quirts" lashing at their ponies' flanks, darted half a dozen painted savages, tearing down upon the spot at the top speed of their agile mounts. Only two men remained on watch at the moment, Dean and one trooper. Most of the others, already in saddle, were filing away up the game trail that threaded the windings of the ravine, the two lead horses with

them, while a few yards behind the young officer and his comrade, halfway down the reverse slope, two others, afoot, handled the reins of their own horses and those of the lieutenant and men still held at the edge. It was an exciting moment. Bruce had only a hundred yards to run before he could get under cover, and there was no chance of their hitting him at that range, yet a puff of smoke rose from the knoll, and a bullet, nearly spent, came tumbling and singing up the turf, and the dashing warriors, yelling wildly, applauded the shot. Bruce took matters coolly. Leaping behind the shelter of the ledge, he reached for his carbine, and in a moment more, as the pursuing Indians came lashing within long range, four seasoned cavalry carbines, each with a keen eye at the sight and a steady finger at the trip, were leveled on the coming foe. Dean's young heart beat hard, it must be owned, for hitherto the Indians had been fighting in retreat or on the defensive, while now they came as though confident of success; but there was soldier exultation and something like savage joy mingling with the thrill of excitement.

"There's more behind those beggars, sir," growled Conroy, a veteran at Indian work, "but they'll sheer off when they get within three hundred yards." On they came, shields and lances dangling,

ponies on the keen jump, feathers and pennons streaming on the wind. But, just as Conroy said, no sooner was Bruce safely under cover and they felt themselves drawing within dangerous range than, fan-like, they opened out to right and left, and, yelling still like fiends, veered in wide circle from their line of attack, and ducking over their ponies' shoulders, clinging with one leg to the upright part of the cantle, they seemed to invite the fire of their white foe—and got it. A daring fellow in the lead came streaking slantwise across the front, as though aiming to pick up the comrade lurking in the dip of the prairie-like slope, and Conroy's carbine was the first to bark, followed almost instantly by Dean's. The scurrying pony threw up his wall-eyed head and lashed with his feathered tail, evidently hit, but not checked, for under the whip he rushed gamely on until another bullet, whistling within a foot of his neck, warned the red rider that he was far too close for safety, for with halting gait the pony turned and labored off the field, and presently was seen to be staggering. "Score one for our side," laughed the Irishman, in glee. "Now's your time, sergeant."

But Bruce, reloading, was gazing sternly at the distant knoll. The other warriors, riding right and left, were now chasing crosswise over the billowy

slopes, keeping up a fire of taunt and chaff and shrill war-cries, but never again venturing within three hundred yards—never wasting a shot.

"I thought so," suddenly cried the sergeant. "They're signaling from the knoll. They never would have attacked with so few, unless there were dozens more within sight. Now's our time, lieutenant. We can mount and ride like hell to the timber—I beg your pardon, sir," he broke off suddenly. "I didn't mean to say what the lieutenant should do."

"No apologies," laughed Dean, his eyes snapping with the vim of the fight. "Glad you see the truth of what I said. Come on. Mount quickly, men."

Two minutes more and the entire party of bluecoats were spurring swiftly northward up the winding gorge, the pack-horses lumbering alongside. Eagerly Dean and Bruce in the lead looked right and left for a game trail leading up the slope, for well they knew that the moment their reinforcements came the warriors would dash into the ravine and, finding their antagonists fled, would pursue along the banks. It would never do to be caught in such a trap. A gallop of a quarter of a mile and, off to the right, a branch ravine opened out to higher ground, and into this the leaders dove and, checking speed, rode at the trot until the ascent

grew steep. Five minutes more and they were well up toward the head of the gulch and presently found themselves nearly on a level with the hillsides about them. Here, too, were scattered pine-trees and a few scrub-oak. The timber, then, was close at hand. Signaling halt to the climbing column, Dean and Bruce, springing from saddle, scrambled up the bank to their right and peered cautiously back down over the tumbling waves of the foothills, and what they saw was enough to blanch the cheek of even veteran Indian fighters.

Far over to the east, beyond an intervening ridge and under the dun cloud of dust, the earth was black for miles with herds of running buffalo. Far down to the southeast, here, there and everywhere over the land, the slopes were dotted with little knots of Indian braves—they could be nothing else—all riding like mad, coming straight toward them. Machpealota probably had launched his whole force on the trail of the luckless troopers.

CHAPTER XIX.

That night there was rejoicing at the new stockade. For over a week not a courier had managed to slip through in either direction. Alarmed for the safety of the little garrison, the commanding officer of the post away up at the gorge of the Big Horn River had sent two troops of cavalry to scout the slopes of the mountains and look into the state of affairs at Warrior Gap. They found countless fresh pony tracks all along the foothills east of the Greasy Grass and in the valleys of the many forks of the Deje Agie—the Crow name for Tongue River—but not an Indian did they see. They marched in among the welcoming officers and men at the bustling post to find themselves hailed as heroes. "We've been cut off from the world for at least ten days," said the commandant. "Our couriers have been killed, captured or driven back. Even our half-breed scouts refuse to make further trial. They say Red Cloud's people cover the land in every direction. Our woodchoppers only work under heavy guard.

The contractors, freighters and workmen threaten to strike unless they get their money. The sutler refuses them further credit. The quartermaster has paid out every cent and says his requisition for ten thousand dollars was ordered filled, and the money ought to have been here a week ago. All will have to stop if the money doesn't come. We're safe enough. The Sioux don't dare come within range of our breech-loaders. But we can't finish the barracks in time for winter at this rate."

A stout-hearted soldier was the commanding officer at Warrior Gap. He had with him now four strong companies of infantry and a troop of horse. He had, he said, but one anxiety, so far as holding the fort was concerned—some few of the officers and quite a number of the soldiers, as has been told, were burdened with their wives and children. If these could only be moved under strong guard to Frayne on the Platte, he could snap his fingers in the face of Red Cloud and his whole gang until they too got breech-loaders. "It's only a question of time!" said he. "Sooner or later the Interior Department will be fool enough to arm the redskins all over the land with magazine rifles, and then there will be lively work for the war office. Any day," said he, further, "we may expect the coming of a whole regiment from the Platte posts, and then

Mr. Lo will have to light out. Meantime, if we hadn't this trouble about the workmen, and could get rid of the women and children, we'd be all right."

So back to the Big Horn rode the squadron to report all safe at Warrior Gap, barring the blockade, and almost on the same date out there started from Laramie, on the long march up the Platte and over across the sage-covered deserts, a strong force of foot and dragoons; and up from the Sweetwater, far to the southwest, came this venturesome little party of ten, bringing the much-demanded money, and all the while, with his far-riding, far-seeing scouts in every direction, Machpealota, perched in the mountains back of the building post, warily watched the dispositions and daily work, and laid his plans accordingly. Not a warrior was permitted to show himself near the stockade, but in a sleepless cordon, five miles out, they surrounded the Gap. Not a messenger had managed to elude their vigilance by day, not one had succeeded in slipping into the little camp by night. Yet, with every succeeding morn the choppers and fatigue parties pushed farther out from the stockade, in growing sense of security, and the Indians let them come.

Full a week before the Laramie column could possibly reach the mountains, however, Red Cloud was

warned of their coming, their numbers, and composition—so many horse soldiers, so many "heap walks." Unmolested, the squadron from Fort C. F. Smith, the Big Horn River post, was permitted to retrace its steps. In fancied safety, born of confidence in that wonderful new breech-loader, the little command at the Gap was lulled to indifference to their surroundings. Then, sending large numbers of his young men to round up the buffalo toward the Platte, but keeping still his stern and vengeful eye upon the prey almost at his feet, the red chief made his final and fatal plans.

There came a cloudless morning when the cavalry troop escorted a young officer up the rocky heights to the west, finding everywhere indications of recent Indian occupancy, but not a redskin barred their way. Without opposition of any kind, without so much as a glimpse of the foe, were they permitted to climb to Signal Rock, and from that point, with powerful glasses, the officers swept the glorious range of foothills, the deep valley of the Tongue, the banks of the Piney and the Crazy Woman, the far-spreading upland prairie rolling away like some heaving ocean suddenly turned to earth, east and southeast to the dim horizon, and there they saw, or thought they saw, full explanation of their recent

freedom from alarm of any kind. There to the south, full thirty miles away, the land was overlaid by a dull, heavy, dun-colored cloud, and traversed by black streaks or blotches that were recognized at once as running buffalo. Red Cloud and his braves then were drawn away in search of other game, and, light of heart and foot, the troopers trotted back to the waiting stockade, to meet there late that evening, as the weird tattoo of the drums and fifes was echoing back from the rocky heights, the first messenger through in nearly fifteen days—a half-breed Sioux from the distant posts along the Platte, bearing a written message from the commanding officer at Frayne, which the veteran commandant at Warrior Gap read with infinite comfort:

"Seven companies of infantry and three more troops of cavalry are on the way and should reach you by Saturday week. The General seems thoroughly alive to the situation, and we, too, are hoping for orders to move out and help you give that infernal old scoundrel the thrashing he deserves. All has been quiet hereabouts since that one party made its dash on Hal Folsom's ranch. Of course you know the story of Lizette, and of course Red Cloud must have known that Burning Star was head devil in that enterprise, though Chaska was the victim.

I take much comfort in the fact that it was I who sent young Dean and his troop round by way of the Laramie. Folsom and his people would have been murdered to a man if I hadn't, and yet I hear that absurd old ass at Emory put Dean in arrest for not coming directly home. Pecksniff should have been retired ten years ago—for imbecility.

"We had a tremendous storm in the mountains to the south two days ago, and a courier has just galloped out from Emory, inquiring for news of Dean. It seems he was sent with a big sum in currency for your quartermaster, and ordered to slip through by way of the Sweetwater, as Red Cloud was known to be covering the direct road. Somehow it leaked out before he started, and a gang of desperadoes gathered to jump him at Cañon Springs. The storm jumped them, for two of their dead and a dozen horses were rolled out on the flats. Dean must have got through all right, for Bat saw their trail fifteen miles above us. Of course, he'll have to make night marches; but, unless Red Cloud gets wind of his coming and corrals him, he should reach you almost as soon as this. Michel, the bearer, has your dispatches and orders. Retained copies are here. Good luck, old man, and may we meet within the fortnight and wind up Red Cloud once and for all time."

This was all, but more than enough. Riding night and day in wide detour, Michel had made his way to the lately beleaguered spot, and what he brought was joyous news, indeed. Within the coming week the post would have no more to fear. Within a day or two the contractors, then, would have their money, and that would tap the sutler's stores and joy would reign supreme. Enviously the soldiers eyed the artisans. Not for weeks could their paymaster be looked for, while the funds for the civilians might reach them on the morrow, provided Red Cloud did not interfere. He couldn't and wouldn't, said the commander, because he and his braves were all off to the southeast, hunting buffalo. He could and might, said Michel that night at ten o'clock, after taps had sent the garrison to bed, for by the time he left Frayne there were other riders up from Gate City and all that garrison had learned that Lieutenant Dean was taking something like fifty thousand dollars in greenbacks up to the Gap, with only ten men to guard it, and Major Burleigh was wild with anxiety lest he shouldn't get through, and had been nearly crazy since he heard of Dean's narrow escape at Cañon Springs. The officer of the day who heard this story took it, with the teller, to the post commander, and that veteran sat up late and cross-questioned long. Michel's English might be broken,

but not his statement. The last arrival at Frayne before he left was one of Major Burleigh's own men from Gate City. He said the General and his staff were expected at Emory the next day, investigating matters, for old Stevens had got stampeded because his sergeant-major was assaulted and old Mr. Folsom knocked out and a drunken captain by the name of Newhall had been making trouble, and it had all told on Major Burleigh, who had taken to his bed with nervous prostration.

So, while the garrison went to rest happy, the commanding officer waked long, and finally slept soundly and might have slept late, but that just at dawn, full half an hour before the time for reveille, there came a sharp knocking at the door of his log-hut, and the imperative voice of the officer of the day.

"Colonel! colonel, I say! There's sharp firing out here in the hills to the south!"

The peaks to the west were just tinging with purple and red, reflected from the eastward sky, and a faint light was beginning to steal down into the deep valley in which the cantonment lay sleeping, when the veteran commander came hurrying out, half-dressed, and hied him, with his attendant officer, to the southern angle of the stockade. There on the narrow ledge or platform built under the

sharp tops of the upright logs, were grouped the silent, grave-faced guard, a dozen men intently listening. Thither presently came running others of the officers or men, suddenly awakened by sense of something unusual going on. Far away among the wooded heights to the south, echoing from the rocky palisades to the west, could be heard the pop, pop of distant musketry, punctuated sometimes with louder bang as of large caliber rifles closer at hand. Little time was there in which to hazard opinion as to the cause. One or two men, faint-hearted at the thought of the peril of Indian battle and hopeful of influencing the judgment of their superiors, began the murmur of "Big hunt," "Buffalo drive," etc., glancing furtively at the colonel the while as though to observe the effect. But an imperative "Silence, you idiots!" from the officer of the day put sudden end to their conjectures. Only a moment did the commander listen. Then, quick and startling, came the order, "Sound to arms!" and within the minute the stirring peal of the cavalry trumpet was answered by the hoarse thunder of the snare-drum, beating the long roll. Out from their "dog tents" and half-finished log huts came the bewildered men. Often as the alarm had sounded on the frontier there was a thrill and ring about it this time that told of action close at hand. Out from the little

huts, hurrying into their frock coats and belting on their swords as they glared about them for the cause of the uproar, came the officers, old and young, most of them veterans of many hard-fought fields of the war days—one or two, only, youngsters fresh from the Point. At many a doorway and unglazed window appeared the pallid faces of women and children, some of them weeping in mingled fright and distress. In front of the log guardhouse the sergeant quickly formed the two reliefs not on post. On their designated parades the companies rapidly fell in, while stern-voiced non-commissioned officers rebuked the laggards and aided them into their belts, and each first sergeant took rapid note of his men. No need to call the roll, a skulker would have been detected and kicked into the ranks at the instant. Over under the rough board shelter of the quartermaster's employees the workmen came tumbling out in shirt sleeves, many of them running to the nearest officer and begging for a gun and a place in the fight, for now the firing was loud and lively. Down by the swift-flowing stream the tethered horses of the cavalry plunged and neighed in excitement, and the mules in the quartermaster's corral set up their irrepressible bray. For five minutes there was clamor, but no confusion. Then disciplined silence reigned again,

all but the nearing volleying at the south. Presently, at rapid trot the cavalry, some fifty strong, came clattering up the stony trail from the stream, and with carbines advanced disappeared through the main gateway in a cloud of dust. Two companies were told off to man the loopholes of the stockade. Two others under the command of a senior captain faced by the right flank, and in double-quick time danced away in the wake of the cavalry. Eagerly the watchers climbed the wooden walls or to the tower of the half-finished guard-house, and, as the red light strengthened in the east and the mountain sides became revealed, studied with their glasses or with straining eyes the southward vista through the hills. They saw the troop form line to the front at the gallop as it swept out over the open ground four hundred yards away, saw its flankers scurry to the nearest shoulder of bluff, saw their excited signals and gesticulations, and presently a sheaf of skirmishers shot forward from the advancing line and breasted the low ridge eight hundred yards out from the fort, and then there came floating back the sound of ringing, tumultuous cheer as the skirmishers reached the crest and darted headlong at some unseen object beyond, and after them went the reserve, cheering too. And now the sound of firing became fierce

and incessant, and messengers came galloping back to the commander of the steadily advancing infantry, and they, too, were seen to throw forward heavy skirmish lines and then resume the march. And then, down over the ridge came a little knot of horsemen, made up of three men riding close together, the outer ones supporting between them the comrade in the center. Before they were within four hundred yards the young adjutant, gazing through his glasses at the colonel's side, exclaimed: "It's Dean—dead or wounded!" and one of the surgeons rushed forward to meet the party. "He's weak, sir, almost gone from loss of blood," exclaimed Trooper Conroy, himself bleeding from a gash along the cheek. A faint smile drifted over the young fellow's pallid face, as the adjutant, too, galloped up. A feeble hand indicated the bulging saddle pocket. A faint voice faltered, "There's ten thousand dollars in that packet. We had to fight our way through," and then the brave blue eyes closed and strong arms lifted the almost lifeless form from the saddle as Marshall swooned away.

CHAPTER XX.

A DAY had dawned on the Big Horn never to be forgotten by those who watched the conflict from the stockade, never to be recalled by those who went forth to fight. Broad daylight had come and the sun was peeping over the far horizon as strong arms bore the unconscious officer within the post, and the commander eagerly questioned the men who came with him. Their story was quickly told. They had fled before overpowering numbers of the Sioux the night before, had made their way through the timber in the darkness and come ahead all night, groping their way from ridge to ridge until at the peep of day they found themselves in sight of familiar landmarks, and could see the gleam of the waters of the Fork dancing away under the dawn. And then, as they essayed to ride on they found the Indians all around them. Whichever way they turned the foe appeared, but only in scattered parties and small numbers. Not once did more than half a dozen appear in sight, and then confident of speedy succor from the fort, they had

decided to make a dash for it, and so rode boldly out into the open. But now a score of warriors popped up and barred the way, while others far out at flank or rear kept up long range fire. One man was shot through the body and fainted and had to be borne along. Then the lieutenant was shot in the leg, but no one knew it until they saw his boot was running over with blood, and he was growing ghastly white, even though he kept encouraging and directing. But when at last the cavalry met them and brushed the Indians away from the front, Captain Drum, who rode at their head, ordered Mr. Dean taken right into the post while he dashed on to punish the Sioux, "and he is giving them hell, too," said the excited trooper, "for there couldn't have been more than a hundred Indians all told."

Ah, not in sight, perhaps, poor lads!—not in sight of horse, foot or fort; for if there were only a hundred, how came it that the fire grew fiercer still, and that presently every musket in the infantry skirmish line, too, was blazing on the foe. By this time cavalry and infantry both had disappeared over the curtaining ridge, and the colonel's face grew grave and haggard as he listened. Three-fifths of his little garrison were out there battling against unknown numbers. They had gone to rescue the detachment and bring it safely in. That

rescue was accomplished. The precious package for which so much had been risked was here—but what detained the command? Why did they not return? Beyond doubt far more Indians were out there now than when first the firing began. "Gallop out, Mr. Adjutant, and tell the major to withdraw his line and fall back on the stockade," was the order—and with a lump in his throat the young officer mounted again and started. He was a pet in the garrison, only in his second year of commission. They saw him gallop through the gate, saw him ride gallantly straight for the curtaining ridge beyond which the smoke was rising heavily now, saw him breasting the slope, his orderly following, saw him almost reach it, and then suddenly the prairie seemed to jet fire. The foremost horse reared, plunged, and went rolling over and over. They saw—plainly saw through their glasses, and a shriek of agony and horror went up from among the women at the sight—half a dozen painted savages spring out from behind the ledge, some on pony back, some afoot, and bear down on the stricken form of the slender young rider now feebly striving to rise from the turf; saw the empty hand outstretched, imploring mercy; saw jabbing lances and brandished war-clubs pinning the helpless boy to earth and beating in the bared, defenseless head;

saw the orderly dragged from under his struggling horse and butchered by his leader's side; saw the bloody knives at work tearing away the hot red scalps, then ripping off the blood-soaked clothing, and, to the music of savage shouts of glee and triumph, hacking, hewing, mutilating the poor remains, reckless of the bullets that came buzzing along the turf from the score of Springfields turned loose at the instant among the loopholes of the stockade. It was eight hundred yards away in the dazzling light of the rising sun. Old Springfields did not carry as do the modern arms. Soldiers of those days were not taught accurate shooting as they are now. It was too far for anything but chance, and all within a minute or two the direful tragedy was over, and the red warriors had darted back behind the ridge from which they came.

"My God! sir," gasped the officer who stood at the side of the awe-stricken post commander, "I believe it's Red Cloud's entire band, and they've got our poor boys surrounded! Can't we send help?"

"Send help! Merciful heaven, man, who's to help us? Who's to protect these poor women and children if we go? I have but two companies left. It's what those fiends are hoping—have been planning—that I'll send out my last man to the aid of

those already gone, and then they'll dart in on the fort, and what will become of these?"

Great drops of sweat were pouring down the colonel's face as he turned and pointed to the huts where now, clinging to one another in terror, many poor wives and children were gathered, and the air was filled with the sobbing of the little ones. Up from the stockade came two young officers, their faces set and rigid, their eyes blazing. "In God's name, colonel," cried the foremost, "let me take my men and clear that ridge so that our people can get back. One charge will do it, sir."

But solemnly the commander uplifted his hand. "Listen," said he, "the battle is receding. They are driving our poor fellows southward, away from us. They are massed between them and us. It would only be playing into their hands, my boy. It's too late to help. Our duty now is here."

"But good God, sir! I can't stay without raising a hand to help. I beg—I implore!"

"Go back to your post at once, sir. You may be needed any minute. Look there! Now!"

And as he spoke the colonel pointed to the southeast. Over the scene beyond the divide to the south hung the bank of pale-blue smoke. Out on the slope lay the ghastly remains of the young adjutant and his faithful comrade who, not ten

minutes before, had galloped forth in obedience to their orders and met their soldier fate. Out to the southeast the ridge fell gradually away into the general level of the rolling prairie, and there, full a thousand yards distant, there suddenly darted into view three horsemen, troopers evidently, spurring madly for home.

"They've cut their way through! Thank God!" almost screamed the spectators at the parapet. But their exultation died an instant later. Over the ridge, in swift pursuit came a dozen painted, feathered braves, their ponies racing at lightning speed, their arrows and bullets whizzing along the line of flight. The horse of the foremost trooper was staggering, and suddenly went plunging headlong, sending his rider sprawling far out on the turf. He was up in a second, dire peril nerving him to desperate effort. His comrades veered at his cry for help and glanced back over their shoulders. One, unnerved at sight of the dashing foemen in pursuit, clapped spurs again, and bending low, rode madly on. The other, gallant fellow! reined about in wide, sweeping circle, and turned back to meet his running comrade. They saw him bend to lend a helping hand, saw him bend still lower as three of the Indians leaped from their ponies and, kneeling, loosed their rifles all at once; saw him topple

out of saddle, and his stricken horse, with flapping rein, trot aimlessly about a moment before he, too, went floundering in his tracks; saw the other soldier turn to face his fate by his dying comrade's side, fighting to the last, overwhelmed and borne down by the rush of red warriors. Strong men turned aside in agony, unable to look on and see the rest—the brutal, pitiless clubbing and stabbing, the fearful hacking of lance and knife—but others still, in the fascination of horror, gazed helplessly through the smoke drifting upward from the blazing loopholes, and once a feeble cheer broke forth as one shot took effect and a yelling Indian stretched out dead upon the sward. Then for a brief moment all eyes centered on the sole survivor who came sweeping down the slope, straight for the stockade. Almost it seemed as though he might yet escape, despite the fact that his horse, too, was lurching and stumbling and his pursuers were gaining rapidly, defiant of the fire of the little fort. Reckless of order and discipline, a dozen soldiers nearest the gate rushed out upon the open bench, shouting encouragement and sending long range, chance shots. But with every stride the fleeing steed grew weaker, stumbled painfully and slackened speed, and soon they saw him slowing down despite the frantic jabbing of the spurs, and with drooped

head and bleeding nostrils giving up the fight. And then, at sound of the triumphant yells and jeers of his pursuers, the poor wretch in saddle threw one fearful glance behind him, one despairing look toward the comrades and the refuge still a quarter of a mile away, and with shaking hand he turned the brown revolver on his own temple and pulled trigger, and then went tumbling earthward, a corpse. There at least was one scalp the Sioux could covet in vain, for with shouts of vengeance, the little squad of infantry, deaf to all orders or the clamor of the bugle recall, dashed out over the level bench, firing furiously as they ran, and, whether from the superstitious awe with which the Indians view the suicide, or the dread of close combat with the gallant band of blue-coats, the mounted warriors turned and scurried away across the prairie, and were presently out of range beyond the ridge again. Then, and not till they had reached and lifted and borne the lifeless form of the trooper, did the little party condescend to answer the repeated summons from the fort. Then at last they slowly returned, unrebuked, for no man had the heart to chide their daring.

Only once more was there further sight of the one-sided battle. Half a mile or more beyond the bare divide there rose against the southern sky a

bold, oblong height or butte, studded with bowlders and stunted pine, and watchers at the fort became aware as the sun climbed higher that the smoke cloud, thinning gradually but perceptibly, was slowly drifting thither. The fire, too, grew faint and scattering. The war-whoops rang and re-echoed among the rocks, but all sound of cheering had long since died away. At last, an hour after the fury of the fight began, the colonel, gazing in speechless grief, through his field-glass, muttered to the officer at his side:

"Some of them are still left. They are fighting for their lives along that butte."

Only a few, though. One by one the dark dots among the bowlders ceased to stir and move about. Little by little the fire slackened, and all but occasional scattered shots died utterly away. Then other forms, feathered and bedizened, were seen rushing in numbers up the distant hillside, and that meant all was over, and the brutal knives were busily at work. Little by little all sound of conflict, all sight of combatants, disappeared entirely, and the unclouded sunshine streamed down upon a scene on which the silence of death indeed had fallen. When at last, late that afternoon, the watchers reported a vast body of Indians drifting away eastward toward the distant Powder River,

and venturesome scouts stole out to reconnoiter, backed by skirmish lines from the stricken post, they found the grassy slopes beyond that curtaining ridge one broad field of death, strewn with the stripped and hacked and mangled forms of those who had so gallantly dashed forth to the aid of comrade soldiery at the break of day, so torn and mutilated and disfigured that only a limited few were ever identified. Officers and men, one after another, had died in their tracks, victims of Red Cloud and the Ogallalla Sioux.

And all for what? Late that night the quartermaster in wild agitation sought his colonel's door, a package in his hands. "For God's sake, sir, look at this!" he cried.

The cords had just been cut, the seals just broken, the stout paper carefully opened and the contents of the precious packet exposed to view. It held no money at all, nothing but layer on layer of waste and worthless paper!

CHAPTER XXI.

A WEEK went by at Fort Emory, and not a word came back from Dean. The furious storm that swept the hills and swelled the rivers was the talk of every army post within two hundred miles, while in the gambling hells and saloons of Laramie, Cheyenne and Gate City men spoke of it in low tones and with bated breath. If ever the bolts of heaven were launched to defeat a foul crime it was right there at Cañon Springs, for the story was all over Wyoming by this time how the worst gang of cutthroats that ever infested the wide West had galloped in strong force to that wild, sequestered nook to murder Dean and his whole party of the hated "blue bellies," if need be, but at all hazards to get the precious package in his charge. Fifty thousand dollars in government greenbacks it contained, if Hank Birdsall, their chosen leader, could be believed, and hitherto he had never led them astray. He swore that he had the "straight tip," and that every man who took honest part in the fight, that was sure to ensue, should have his square one thousand dollars. Thirty

to ten, surrounding the soldiers along the bluffs on every side, they counted on easy victory. But the warning thunder had been enough for the young troop leader, and prompted him to break camp and get out of the gorge. They were starting when Birdsall's scouts peered over the bank and the outlaw ordered instant pursuit, just in time to meet the fury of the flood and to see some of his fellows drowned like rats in a sewer.

But who betrayed the secret? What officer or government employé revealed the fact that Dean was going with so much treasure?—and what could have been his object? Birdsall had taken to the mountains and was beyond pursuit. "Shorty," one of his men, rescued from drowning by the mail carrier and escort coming down from Frayne, confessed the plot and the General was now at Emory investigating. Major Burleigh had taken to his bed. Captain Newhall was reported gone to Denver. Old John Folsom lay with bandaged head and blinded eyes in a darkened room, assiduously nursed by Pappoose and Jessie, who in turn were devotedly attended by Mrs. Fletcher. Possessed of some strange nervous excitement, this energetic woman was tireless in her effort to be of use. Minus ten of their very best, "C" Troop still camped at Emory, the General holding it for possible escort

duty, and, to his huge delight, young Loomis was assigned to command it until Dean should return. There came a day when the news arrived from Frayne that the Laramie column had crossed the Platte and marched on for the Big Horn, and then John Folsom began to mend and was allowed to sit up, and told the doctor he had need to see Major Burleigh without delay, but Burleigh could not leave his bed, said the physician in attendance—a very different practitioner from Folsom's—and the old man began to fret and fume, and asked for writing materials. He wrote Burleigh a note, and the doctor forbade his patient's reading anything. Major Burleigh, said he, was a very sick man, and in a wretchedly nervous condition. Serious consequences were feared unless utter quiet could be assured.

Then Folsom was pronounced well enough to be taken out for a drive, and he and Pappoose had the back seat together, while Jessie, with Harry Loomis to drive, sat in front, and Jess was shy and happy, for Loomis had plainly lost his heart to his comrade's pretty sister. Marshall had now been gone nine days and could soon be expected home, said everybody, for with a big force going up there the Indians would scatter and "the boys" would have no trouble coming back. And so this lovely

summer afternoon every one seemed bright and joyous at the fort, listening to the band and wondering, some of the party at least, how much longer it would be before they could hope to hear from the absent, when there arose sudden sounds of suppressed commotion in the camp of "C" Troop. A courier was coming like mad on the road from Frayne—a courier whose panting horse reined up a minute, with heaving flanks, in the midst of the thronging men, and all the troop turned white and still at the news the rider briefly told:—three companies at Warrior Gap were massacred by the Sioux, one hundred and seventy men in all, including Sergeant Bruce and all "C" Troop's men but Conroy and Garret, who had cut their way through with Lieutenant Dean and were safe inside the stockade, though painfully wounded. This appalling story the girls heard with faces blanched with horror. Passionate weeping came to Jessie's relief, but Pappoose shed never a tear. The courier's dispatches were taken in to the colonel, and Folsom, trembling with mingled weakness and excitement, followed.

It was an impressive scene as the old soldier read the sad details to the rapidly growing group of weeping women, for that was Emory's garrison now, while the official reports were hurried on to

catch the General on his way to Cheyenne. Some one warned the band leader, and the musicians marched away to quarters. Some one bore the news to town where the flags over the hotel and the one newspaper office were at once lowered to half staff, although that at Emory, true to official etiquette and tradition, remained until further orders at the peak, despite the fact that two of the annihilated companies were from that very post. Some one bore the news to Burleigh's quarters at the depot, and, despite assertions that the major could see no one and must not be agitated or disturbed, disturbed and agitated he was beyond peradventure. Excitedly the sick man sprang from his bed at the tidings of the massacre and began pen ning a letter. Then he summoned a young clerk from his office and told him he had determined to get up at once, as now every energy of the government would doubtless be put forth to bring the Sioux to terms. It was the young clerk who a few weeks back had remarked to a fellow employé how "rattled" the old man was getting. The major's doctor was not about. The major began dictating letters to various officials as he rapidly dressed, and what happened can best be told in the clerk's own words: "For a man too sick to see any one two hours before," said he, "the major had wonderful

recuperative powers, but they didn't last. He was in the midst of a letter to the chief quartermaster, and had got as far as to say, 'The deplorable and tragic fate of Lieutenant Dean points, of course, to the loss of the large sum intrusted to him,' when I looked up and said, 'Why, Lieutenant Dean ain't dead, major; he got in all right,' and he stared at me a minute as if I had stabbed him. His face turned yellow-white and down he went like a log—had a fit I s'pose. Then I ran for help, and then the doctor came and hustled everybody out."

But not till late that night did these details reach "Old Pecksniff" at the post. A solemn time was that veteran having, for many of the women were almost in hysterics and all were in deep distress. Two of their number, wives of officers, were widowed by the catastrophe, and one lay senseless for hours. It was almost dark when Mr. Folsom and the girls drove homeward, and his face was lined and haggard. Pappoose nestled fondly, silently at his side, holding his hand and closely scanning his features, as though striving to read his thoughts. Jessie, comforted now by the knowledge that Marshall was rapidly recovering, and the words of praise bestowed upon him in the colonel's letters, was nevertheless in deep anxiety as to the future. The assurance hat the

Sioux, even in their overwhelming numbers, would not attack a stockade, was not sufficient. Marshall would be on duty again within a very few days, the colonel said. His wounds would heal within the week, and it was only loss of so much blood that had prostrated him. Within a few days, then, her loved brother would be in saddle and in the field against the Indians. Who could assure her they would not have another pitched battle? Who could say that the fate that befell the garrison at Warrior Gap might not await the troop when next it rode away? And poor Jess had other anxieties, too, by this time. Loomis was burning with eagerness for orders to lead it instantly to join the field column, and importuned Colonel Stevens, even in the midst of all the grief and shock of the early evening. Almost angrily the veteran colonel bade him attend to his assigned duties and not demand others. "C" Troop should not with his advice and consent be sent north of the Platte. "First thing you know, sir, after they've got all the troops up along the Big Horn you'll see the Sioux in force this side of the river, murdering right and left, and not a company to oppose them. No, sir, more than enough of that troop have already been sacrificed! The rest shall stay here."

And well was it, for one and all, that "Old

Pecksniff" held firm to his decision. It was one of his lucid intervals.

Late that evening, after ten o'clock, there came the sound of hoof-beats on the hard road and the crack of the long-lashed mule-whip, and the fort ambulance clattered up to Folsom's gate, and the colonel himself, his adjutant by his side, came nervously up the gravel walk. Folsom met them at his door. Instinctively he felt that something new and startling was added to the catalogue of the day's disastrous tidings. Pecksniff's face was eloquent of gravest concern, mingled with irrepressible excitement.

"Let me see you in private, quick," he said. "Mr.—Ah—Mr. Adjutant, will you kindly remain in the parlor," and, taking Folsom by the elbow, Pecksniff led impetuously into the library. The girls had gone aloft only a moment before, but, dreading news of further evil, Pappoose came fluttering down.

"Go in and welcome the adjutant, dear," said Folsom hurriedly. "The colonel and I have some matters to talk of." Obediently she turned at once, and, glancing up the stairs, noted that Mrs. Fletcher's door must have been suddenly opened, for the light from her room was now streaming on the third-floor balusters. Listening again! What

could be the secret of that woman's intense watchfulness? In the parlor the young staff officer was pacing up and down, but his face lighted at sight of Elinor.

"Do you know—Is there anything new?—anything worse?" she quickly asked, as she gave her slim young hand.

"Not concerning our people," was the significant answer. "But I fear there's more excitement coming."

Barely waiting for Elinor to withdraw, "Pecksniff" had turned on Folsom. "You know I opposed the sending of that party? You know it was all ordered on Burleigh's urging and representations, do you not?"

"Yes, I heard so," said Folsom. "What then?"

"You know he planned the whole business—sent 'em around by Cañon Springs and the Sweetwater?"

"Yes, I heard that, too," said Folsom, still wondering.

"You know some one must have put that Birdsall gang on the scent, and that Burleigh has had alleged nerve prostration ever since, and has been too ill to see any one or to leave his bed."

"Yes, so we were told."

"Well, he's well enough to be up and away—God knows where, and here is the reason—just in from

the north," and, trembling with excitement, Pecksniff pointed to the closing paragraph of the letter in his hand:

"Cords, seals and wrapping were intact when handed to the quartermaster, but the contents were nothing but worthless paper. It must have been so when given to Lieutenant Dean."

Folsom's eyes were popping from his head. He sank into a chair, gazing up in consternation.

"Don't you see, man!" said Pecksniff, "some one in the depot is short ten thousand dollars or so. Some one hoped to cover this shortage in just this way—to send a little squad with a bogus package, and then turn loose the biggest gang of ruffians in the country. They would have got it but for the storm at Cañon Springs, and no one would have been the wiser. They couldn't have got it without a murderous fight. No one would ever dare confess his complicity in it. No statement of theirs that there wasn't a cent in the sack could ever be believed. Some one's shortage would be covered and his reputation saved. The plot failed, and God's mercy was over Dean's young head. He'd 'a been murdered or ruined if the plan worked—and now Burleigh's gone!"

CHAPTER XXII.

YES, Burleigh was gone, and there was confusion at the depot. At six the doctor had come forth from his room, saying he was better, but must not be disturbed. At seven the major, carrying a satchel, had appeared at his office, where two clerks were smoking their pipes, innocent of all thought of their employer's coming. It was after hours. They had no business there at the time. Smoking was prohibited in the office, yet it was the major who seemed most embarrassed at the unexpected meeting. It was the major who hastily withdrew. He was traced to the railway, and it was speedily found that he had sent word to the division superintendent that the General had telegraphed for him to join him at once at Cheyenne, and a special engine and caboose would be needed. At a quarter past seven this had started full speed. It was eleven when the discovery was made. Meantime Folsom and Stevens had consulted together. Folsom had told of the large sum he had loaned Burleigh and the conditions attached, and between them a

dispatch, concisely setting forth their suspicions, was sent the General at Cheyenne, with orders to "rush," as they were determined if possible to head off the fugitive at that point. Back came the wire ten minutes before midnight that the General had left Cheyenne for Laramie by stage that evening, and must now be near the Chugwater and far from telegraphic communication. Then Stevens wired the sheriff at Cheyenne and the commanding officer of the new post of Fort Russell to stop Burleigh at all hazards, and at two in the morning the answer came that the major had reached Cheyenne about midnight and they would search everywhere for him. That was the last until long after the rising of another sun.

Events and excitements, alarms and rumors followed each other with startling rapidity during the day. In glaring headlines the local paper published the details of the massacre at the Gap, lauding the valor and devotion of the soldiers, but heaping abuse upon the commander of the post, who, with other troops at his disposal, had looked on and lifted no hand to aid them. Later, of course, it was proved that the veteran had foiled old Red Cloud's villainous plan to lure the whole garrison into the open country and there surround and slowly annihilate it, while then, or at their leisure later,

his chosen ones should set fire to the unprotected stockade and bear off those of the women or children whose years did not commend them to the mercy of the hatchet. Soldiers and thinking men soon saw the colonel was right and that the only mistake he had made was in allowing any of the garrison to go forth at all. But this verdict was not published, except long after as unimportant news and in some obscure corner. The Laramie column, so the news ran, was hastening down the Powder River to strike Red Cloud. The Indians would be severely punished, etc., etc. But old Folsom's face grew whiter yet as he read that such orders had been sent and that the General himself was now at Laramie directing matters. "In God's name," urged he, "if you have any influence with the General, tell him not to send a foot column chasing horsemen anywhere, and above all not to follow down the Powder. Next thing you know Red Cloud and all his young men will have slipped around their flank and come galloping back to the Platte, leaving the old men and women and worn-out ponies to make tracks for the 'heap walks' to follow."

And Stevens listened dumbly. Influence he had never had. Folsom might be right, but it was a matter in which he was powerless. When a depot

quartermaster, said he, could dictate the policy that should govern the command of a colonel of the fighting force, there was no use in remonstrance. Noon came and no news from the Cheyenne sheriff. The commanding officer at Russell wired that he, too, was stripped of his troops and had not even a cavalry courier to send after the General with the startling news that Major Burleigh had vanished with large sums, it was believed, in his possession. At one o'clock came tidings of the fugitive. He, together with two other men, had spent the late hours of the night at the lodgings of one of the party in Cheyenne, and at dawn had driven away in a "rig" hired at a local stable, ostensibly to follow the General to Laramie. They had kept the road northwestward on leaving town—were seen passing along the prairie beyond Fort Russell, but deputies, sworn in at once and sent in pursuit, came back to say the rig had never gone as far as Lodge Pole. At six P.M. came further tidings. Lieutenant Loring, engineer officer of the department, had reached Cheyenne and was in consultation with the commanding officer at Russell. The rig had been found at Sloan's ranch, far up Crow Creek, where the party had taken horses and ridden westward into the Black Hills. In anticipation of a big reward, the sheriff had deputies out in pursuit.

From such information as they could gather it was learned that the name of one of the parties gone with Burleigh was Newhall, who claimed to be a captain in the army, "out there looking after investments"—a captain who was too busy, however, to go and see the few fellows of his cloth at the new post and who was not known to them by sight at all. The engineer, Mr. Loring, was making minute inquiries about this fellow, for the description given him had excited not a little of his interest.

And so the sun of the second day went down on Gate City and Emory, and everybody knew Burleigh was gone. The wildest rumors were afloat, and while all Fort Emory was in mourning over the tragedy at Warrior Gap, everybody in town seemed more vividly concerned in Burleigh and the cause of his sudden flight. As yet only certain army officers and Mr. Folsom knew of the startling discovery at the stockade—that the package was a bogus affair throughout. But all Gate City knew Burleigh had drawn large sums from the local bank, many citizens had heard that John Folsom was several thousand dollars the poorer for his sudden going, and all interest was centered in the coming from Chicago of an expert, summoned by wire, to open the huge office safe at the quartermaster's depot. The keys had gone with Burleigh.

At the last moment, after loading up with all the cash his own private safe contained, for that was found open and practically empty in its corner of his sitting-room, and when he had evidently gone to the office to get the funds there stored, he was confounded by the sight of the two employés. He could have ordered them to leave and then helped himself, but conscience had made a coward of him, even more than nature. He saw accusers in every face, and fled. Burleigh had lost his nerve.

Two days went by and excitement was at its height. All manner of evil report of Burleigh was now afloat. The story of the bogus package had been noised abroad through later messengers and dispatches from the Gap. Lieutenant Loring had come to Fort Emory under the instructions of the department commander, and what those instructions were no man could find out from the reticent young officer. If ever a youth seemed capable of hearing everything and telling nothing it was this scientist of a distinguished corps that frontiersmen knew too little of. What puzzled Folsom and old Pecksniff was the persistence with which he followed up his inquiries about Captain Newhall. He even sought an interview with Pappoose and asked her to describe the rakish traveler who had so unfavorably impressed her. She was looking her loveliest that evening.

Jessie was radiant once more. A long letter had come from Marshall—sad because of the fate that had befallen his companions, stern because of the evidence of the deep-laid plot that so nearly made him a victim, but modestly glad of the official commendation he had received, and rejoicing over the surgeon's promise that he would be well enough to make the march with a command ordered back to Frayne. Red Cloud's people had scattered far and wide, said he. "God grant they may not turn back to the south." He was coming home. He would soon be there. The papers had told their readers this very morning that the General had plainly said his force was too small to risk further assault upon the Sioux. Alarmed at the result of its policy, the Bureau had recommended immediate abandonment of Warrior Gap and the withdrawal of the troops from the Big Horn country. The War Department, therefore, had to hold its hand. The Indians had had by long, long odds the best of the fight, and perhaps would be content to let well enough alone. All this had tended to bring hope to the hearts of most of the girls, and Loring's welcome was the more cordial because of this and because of his now known championship of Marshall's cause. From being a fellow under the ban of suspicion and the cloud of official censure, Marshall Dean was

blossoming out as a hero. It was late in the evening when Folsom brought the young engineer from the hotel and found Elinor and Jessie in the music-room, with Pecksniff's adjutant and Loomis in devoted attendance. It was nearly eleven when the officers left—two returning to the fort, Loring lingering for a word with Folsom at the gate. The night was still and breathless. The stars gleamed brilliantly aloft, but the moon was young and had early gone to bed. A window in the third story softly opened, as the two men stopped for their brief conference—the one so young-looking, sturdy and alert, despite the frost of so many winters; the other so calm and judicial, despite his youth.

"Up to this afternoon at five no trace of them has been found," said Loring. "Day after to-morrow that safe-opener should reach us. If you have influence with Colonel Stevens you should urge him to have a guard at the quartermaster's depot, even if he has to strip the fort. The General cannot be reached by wire."

"Why?" asked Folsom, looking up in alarm. "You don't suppose he'd come back to rob his own office?"

"He is not the man to take a risk, but there are those with him not so careful, and the hand that sent Birdsall's gang in chase of Dean could send

them here, with the safe-key. Those few clerks and employés would be no match for them."

"By heaven, I believe you're right!" cried Folsom. "Which way are you going now?"

"Back to the hotel by way of the depot," was the answer. "Will you go?"

"One moment. I do not travel about just now without a gun," said Folsom, stepping within doors, and even the low sound of their voices died away and all was still as a desert. The old trader did not return at once. Something detained him—Miss Folsom, probably, reasoned the engineer, as he stood there leaning on the gate. Aloft a blind creaked audibly, and, gazing upward, Loring saw a dark, shadowy shutter at the third-story window swing slowly in. There was no wind to move it. Why should human hands be so stealthy? Then a dim light shone through the slats, and the shade was raised, and, while calmly watching the performance, Loring became aware of a dim, faint, far-away click of horse's hoofs at the gallop, coming from the north.

"If that were from the eastward, now," thought he, "it might bring stirring news." But the sound died away after a moment, as though the rider had dived into sandy soil.

Just then Folsom reappeared. "I had to explain

to my daughter. She is most reluctant to have me go out at night just now."

"Naturally," said Loring calmly. "And have you been way up to the third story? I suppose Miss Folsom has gone to her room."

"The girls have, both of them—but not to the third story. That's Mrs. Fletcher's room."

"Ah, yes. The woman, I believe, who accidentally scared your horse and threw you?"

"The very one!" he answered. "I'm blessed if I know what should have taken her out at that hour. She says she needed air and a walk, but why should she have chosen the back-gate and the alley as a way to air and sunshine?"

"Would you mind taking me through that way?" asked the engineer suddenly. "It's the short cut to the depot, I understand."

"Why, certainly. I hadn't thought of that," said Folsom. "Come right on."

And so, while the hoof-beats up the road grew louder, the two turned quickly back to the rear of the big frame house. "That coming horse brings news," muttered Loring to himself, as he turned the corner. "We can head him off, but I want to see this situation first."

Looking away southeastward from the porch of Folsom's homestead, one could see in the daytime a

vista of shingled roofs and open yards, a broad valley, with a corral and inclosures on the southern edge of the town, but not a tree. To-night only dim black shadows told where roof and chimney stood, and not a sign could they see of the depot. Loring curiously gazed aloft at the rear and side windows of the third story. "They command quite a view, I suppose," said he, and even as he spoke the sash of the southeast room was softly raised, the blind swung slightly outward. That woman watching and listening again! And it was she whose sudden and startling appearance at the rear gate had led to Folsom's throw so early the morning Burleigh and his mysterious friend were found missing from their quarters just after dawn—the very morning Dean, with his treasure package and little escort, rode forth from Emory on that perilous mission—the very morning that Birdsall and his murderous gang set forth from Gate City in pursuit.

And now those hoof-beats up the road were coming closer, and Folsom, too, could hear and was listening, even while studying Loring's face. Suddenly a faint gleam shot across the darkness overhead. Glancing quickly upward, both men, deep in shadow, saw that the eastern window on the southern side was lighted up. Out in the alleyway,

low yet clear, a whistle sounded—twice. Then came cautious footsteps down the back stairs. The bolt of the rear door was carefully drawn. A woman's form, tall and shrouded in a long cloak, came swiftly forth and sped down the garden walk to that rear gate. "Come on, quick!" murmured the engineer, and on tiptoe, wondering, the two men followed. They saw her halt at the barred gate. Low, yet distinct she spoke a single name: "George!" And without, in the alley, a voice answered: "I'm here! open, quick!"

"Swear that you are alone!"

"Oh, stop that damned nonsense! Of course I'm alone!" was the sullen reply, and at the sound of the voice Loring seemed fairly to quiver. The gate was unbarred. A man's form, slender and shadowy, squeezed in and seemed peering cautiously about. "You got my note?" he began. "You know what's happened?"

But a woman's muffled scream was the answer. With a spring like a cat Loring threw himself on the intruder and bore him down. In an instant Folsom had barred the gate, and the woman, moaning, fell upon her knees.

"Mercy! Mercy!" she cried. "It is all my fault. I sent for him."

"Take your hands off, damn you, or you'll pay

for this!" cried the undermost man. "I'm Captain Newhall, of the army!"

"You're a thief!" answered Loring, through his set teeth. "Hand over the key of that safe!"

The sound of hoof-beats at the front had suddenly ceased. There was a sputter and scurry in the alley behind. Full half a dozen horses must have gone tearing away to the east. Other lights were popping in the windows now. Folsom's household was alarmed. Attracted by the scream and the sound of scuffle, a man came hurrying toward them from the front.

"Halt! Who are you?" challenged Folsom, covering him with his revolver.

"Don't shoot. I'm Ned Lannion—just in from the ranch. Have you heard anything of Hal, sir?"

"Of Hal?" gasped Folsom, dropping his pistol in dismay. "In God's name, what's wrong?"

"God only knows, sir. Mrs. Hal's nigh crazy. He's been gone two days."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Five days later the women and children from Warrior Gap, most of them bereaved, all of them unnerved by the experiences of that awful day, arrived at old Fort Frayne, escorted by a strong command of infantry and all that was left of the cavalry troop at the stockade. A sad procession it was as it slowly forded the Platte and ascended the winding road to the post, where sorrowing, sympathetic army women met and ministered to them. With them, too, came such of the wounded as could be moved, and at the head of the little squad of horse rode Lieutenant Dean, whom the post commander and several officers greeted almost effusively.

Yet almost the first question was, "Did you see any Indians?"

"Not one," answered Dean. "They seem to have drawn away from the Big Horn road entirely. Why do you ask?" he added anxiously.

"There were signal fires out at Eagle Butte last night, and I've just had a letter from old Folsom at

the ranch on the Laramie. He begs us to send a guard at once, and I haven't a horseman. There's been the devil to pay at young Folsom's place."

Dean's face went a shade paler. "What's happened?" he asked.

"A dozen of his best horses run off by Birdsall's gang, probably to replace those they lost in the flood, and Hal himself was shot and left for dead in the hills. He'd have died but for an Ogallalla girl and a couple of half-breeds who had a hunting-lodge out near the Peak. There are letters for you at the office."

There were two—one from Loomis, at Emory; one from Jessie, of all places in the world, at Folsom's ranch. This he read first.

"We got here late night before last, after such an exciting journey, Marshall dear," said she, "and I can't begin to tell you all the strange things that have happened, for Mr. Folsom says the messenger must start for Fort Frayne in twenty minutes. That villain, Major Burleigh, who dared to speak ill of you, turned out to be as bad as I ever said he was. They haven't caught him yet, but they've got Captain Newhall. Mr. Folsom and Mr. Loring did that—caught him in the backyard of our house, down by the gate, and in some way Mrs. Fletcher induced him to come there, for he had the key of the safe at the quartermaster's depot, and was going to get the money Major Burleigh dared not take when he fled. I can't understand it at all, and Pappoose doesn't

like to talk about it. But Mr. Folsom was robbed of lots of money by Major Burleigh. Mrs. Fletcher is mixed up in it in such a queer way, I can't explain how. She was nearly crazy when we came away, and Mr. Folsom was so good and kind to her, left a nurse with her, and made her stay at the house, although she wanted to pack her things and go to the hotel or the jail, she didn't care which; but he wouldn't let her.

"And right in the midst of it all Ned Lannion, who came with news before, galloped in to tell how Halbert Folsom had been missing two days and Mrs. Folsom was crazy with fear, so Mr. Folsom left Lieutenant Loring to attend to all the matters about the robbery and started at once for the ranch, and Pappoose, of course, insisted on going with him, and I would not be left behind. And here we are. Now I can see the hills where you had the fight and wore Elinor's picture, and it was right out there among them that Halbert was found. Horse thieves had run off his best horses—the same gang of murderers that, they say, planned to trap you and that you outwitted. Oh! Marshall, was ever a girl so proud of her brother!—and they shot Hal and he was found and taken care of by some Indian people, tame ones, and one was a girl, Lizette, who had fallen in love with him four years ago. Wasn't it romantic? And she's gone again, but Hal is safe here, although Mrs. Folsom is more than half-crazy, and now old Mr. Folsom is worried to death, and says we must start back for home to-morrow. It's seventy-five miles and we don't want to go at all, only I'm so eager to see you, and I heard—at least Mr. Loomis told me you'd be back any day, and he has your troop till you come, and he's so fond of you— Oh, here's Pappoose to say this must go at once."

The colonel sat watching the young fellow as he read. "Bad news, Dean?" he queried.

"Every kind of news, sir. It's all a whirl. The devil seems to have broken loose in Wyoming. Let me skim through Loomis' note.

"DEAR DEAN: In case the letter sent yesterday passes you on the way, I add a line to say that if ever I said a mean thing about Loring when we were in the corps, I take it back. I thought him a prig when we wore the gray. He rather 'held us under' anyhow, being a class ahead, you know, but the way he has panned out here and wiped up Wyoming with the only men I ever knew that tried to wrong you is simply wonderful. He's nabbed three of the Birdsall gang and is away now after Burleigh. The news from Folsom's ranch is more reassuring. Hal was shot by horsethieves who were running off stock, and was found and taken care of by friendly Indians, but Mrs. Hal had an awful scare and sent for the old man, who went, of course—both young ladies going with him. They were miles away before we knew it at the fort. I tried to pursuade old Pecksniff that he ought to let me go with twenty troopers to guard the ranch and scout the Laramie, and he threatened to put me in arrest. Of all the double-dashed, pig-headed old idiots he's the worst. I don't want people at the ranch to be scared, but if the Sioux only would make some demonstration this way that would give me a chance. I'd try to earn a little of the reputation that you're winning, old boy, and no man knows better how much you deserve it than

"Your friend and classmate, HANK L."

"P. S.—Loring took ten of the troop into the

Black Hills to beat up Burleigh, but he said if they struck Indian sign he meant to make for Folsom's ranch. Now, if we could only meet there!"

The sun was well down at the west. The day's march had been long and tedious, as only cavalry marches are when long wagon trains have to be escorted. Dean had not yet fully recovered strength, but anxiety lent him energy.

"If Mr. Folsom says there is need of cavalry guard at the Laramie, it is because he dreads another Indian visit, colonel. I have nine men in good shape. Our horses are fresh, or will be after a few hours' rest. May I push on to-night?"

And to the young soldier's surprise the elder placed a trembling hand upon his shoulder and looked him earnestly in the eyes. "Dean, my boy, it's my belief you cannot start too soon. Do you know who Lizette is?"

"I've heard the story," said Marshall briefly. "She must have been hovering about there for some time."

"Yes, and now her people know it, and it will rekindle their hatred. The moment I heard of this I sent old Bat to watch the crossing at La Bonté. Not an hour ago this came in by the hand of his boy," and the colonel held out a scrap of paper. It was a rude pictograph, a rough sketch, map-like, of

a winding river—another and smaller one separated from the first by a chain of mountains. The larger one was decorated by a flag-pole with stars and stripes at the top and a figure with musket and bayonet at the bottom. The smaller one by a little house, with smoke issuing from the chimney, and a woman beside it. Above all, its head over the mountains pointing toward the house, its tail extending north of the bigger stream, was a comet—the "totem" or sign of the Ogallalla lover of Lizette. The story was told at a glance. Burning Star was already south of the Platte and lurking in the mountains near Folsom's ranch.

That night, toward ten o'clock, an anxious council was held. Halbert Folsom, fevered by his severe wound, was lying half-unconscious on his bed, his unhappy wife wandering aimlessly about at times, wringing her hands and weeping, evidently unbalanced by the terrors that had beset her of late and the tidings of that awful Indian revenge along the Big Horn. Silent, helpful, almost commanding, Elinor spent the hours sometimes at her brother's bedside, then at that of her sister-in-law when the poor creature could be induced to lie still a moment. The burly little son and heir, long since sound asleep in his cradle, was watched over by Jessie, whose heart fluttered in dread she dare not say of

what. Twice that afternoon she had seen whispered conferences between old Folsom and Lannion. She knew that for some better reason than that he was overpersuaded by Pappoose, Mr. Folsom had not carried out his project of sending them back to Gate City. She saw that he made frequent visits to the cellar and had changed the arrangement of the air ports. She noted that the few ranch hands hung about the premises all day, their rifles ever within reach, and that often Mr. Folsom took the glasses and searched the road to Frayne. She saw that earth was being heaped up in places against the ranch where the walls were thin or made of boarding. She saw that water and provisions were being stored in the cellar, and she knew that it could all mean only one thing—that the Indians were again in force in the neighborhood, and that an Indian siege was imminent.

And all this time Pappoose, though very brave, was so still and so intent upon her duties. Even when supper was served for the ranch people in the kitchen that evening, as the sun went down, Jess noted that two of the men kept constantly in saddle, riding round the buildings and anxiously scanning the open prairie on every side. There were only six men, all told now, including Folsom (of course not counting Hal, who was defenseless),

altogether too small a number to successfully protect so large a knot of buildings against an insidious and powerful foe, and even of these six there were two who seemed so unstrung by tidings of the massacre as to be nearly nerveless.

Darkness settled down upon the valley, and, though calm and collected, Folsom seemed oppressed by the deepest anxiety. Every now and then he would step forth into the night and make a circuit of the buildings, exchange a word in low tone with some invisible guardian, for, heavily armed, the employés were gathered at the main building, and the wife and children of the chief herdsman were assigned to a room under its roof. Particularly did Folsom pet and encourage the dogs, two of them splendid mastiffs in whom Hal took unusual pride. Then he would return to his son's bedside, bend anxiously over him and lay a loving hand on Pappoose's lustrous hair. It must have been ten o'clock and a night wind was rising, making the occasional cry of the coyotes even more weird and querulous, when they heard the sudden, fierce challenge of Trooper, the keenest, finest of the mastiffs, and instantly his bark was echoed by the rush and scurry of every canine on the place. The men on the porch sprang to their feet and Folsom hastened out to join them. The dogs had charged in the dark-

ness toward the northeast, and somewhere out in that direction were now all furiously barking. Aloft the skies were heavily clouded. The moon was banked and not a glimmer of light shone on earth or heaven. Suddenly, afar out over the prairie, beyond where the dogs were challenging, there was heard the sound of a pony's neigh, an eager appeal for welcome and shelter, and Folsom sprang confidently forward, his powerful tones calling off the dogs. They came back, growling, sniffing, only half-satisfied, still bristling at the unseen visitor. "War ponies never neigh," said Folsom. "Who are you, brothers—friends?" he called, in the Sioux tongue, and a faint voice answered from the darkness, a pony came loping dimly into view, almost running over him, and in another minute an Indian girl, trembling with fear and exhaustion, had toppled from the saddle and clasped the old trader's hand.

"Good God! Lizette," he cried, "you again? What is wrong?" for her head was drooping, her knees giving way beneath her, as the poor child whispered her answer:

"Sioux coming—plenty braves! Hide—quick!"

And Folsom bore her in his arms within.

CHAPTER XXIV.

NEVER unless sure of its ground and the weakness of the adversary does the modern Indian band attack at night. Folsom and his people well knew that. Yet not five minutes after the Indian girl, faint with exhaustion and dread, was carried within doors, the big mastiff challenged again. The dogs charged furiously out to the northeast and would not be recalled. For nearly half an hour they kept up their angry clamor. Time and again during the night, suspicious and excited, they dashed out again and again, and once one of them, venturing further than his fellows, broke suddenly into loud cries of mingled pain and rage, and when at last he came whining piteously back to the ranch it was found that he was bleeding from a gash along the flank, where an Indian arrow had seared him. Only by fits and starts did any man sleep. Hour after hour Folsom's little garrison was on the alert. The women had all been moved to the deep, dry cellar, Mrs. Hal moaning over her baby, utterly unnerved, Jessie silent, but white and tremulous; the herds-

man's wife, an Amazon, demanded the right to have a gun and fight by her husband's side; Lizette, the Indian girl, faint and starved, asked nothing but to be allowed to crouch at the door of the room where Halbert lay, fevered and unconscious, and Pappoose, scorning danger, flitted from her brother's bedside to her father's log-barricade at the east porch. In dread anxiety the hours dragged by, and at last Lannion reached forth his hand and pulled the shirt sleeve of his comrade Jake, half-dozing at his side. In an instant the latter was kneeling at his post. "What is it?" he queried, and Lannion, pointing to the first faint, pallid gleam in the eastern sky, whispered: "Time to be up, man. It's coming."

For half an hour, except for the rushing of the Laramie, a silence almost unearthly had brooded over the prairie, and even the dogs seemed lulled to sleep. But now, as the cold light crept slowly over the distant range, and a soft flush began to overspread the pallor of the dawn, far out over the valley the yelp of a coyote began again and all men strained their ears and listened, while strong hands grabbed the growling dogs and pinned them to earth, for, beginning at the east, the cry was taken up on every side. Folsom's ranch seemed beleaguered by the gaunt, half-famished wolves of the up-

land prairies. "Look to your sights, now, men! Down into the cellar, Pappoose!" exclaimed Folsom, kindling with fierce excitement. "I've been the friend of all that tribe for thirty years, but when they break faith with me and mine that ends it! Look to your sights and make every shot count!" he cautioned, as he made the rounds of the little shelters thrown up during the past two days. "We can stand off a hundred of 'em if you only keep your grit."

Again the clamor as of coyotes ceased. It was only the Indian signal "Ready," and every ranchman knew that with the rising sun, if not before, the swoop would come. Again as the light broadened the dogs were loosed and presently were challenging all four points of the compass. The unseen foe was on every hand.

Perched as it was on a little rise, the ranch stood forth conspicuous over the valley. At the foot of the slope to the south lay the corral and some of the buildings, about one hundred yards away, where the shallow Laramie curled and lapped beneath their walls, and now the dogs seemed to concentrate their attention on that side. Folsom, rifle in hand, was kneeling on the porch, listening intently. Two of the hands were with him. Jake and Lannion, experienced and reliable, had been given independ-

ent posts on the other front, and just as objects could be dimly recognized along the flats, there burst upon the ears of the little garrison a sudden chorus of exultant yells. A tongue of flame leaped upward from beyond the huts lately occupied by the ranchmen. The half-used haystacks caught and held one moment the fiery messenger, and then in a broad glare that reddened the flood of the Laramie for miles and lighted up the ranch like a sunburst, gave forth a huge column of blaze and smoke that could be seen far over the Black Hills of Wyoming, and all the valley seemed to spring to instant life. On every side arose the stirring warcry of the Sioux, the swift beat of pony hoofs, the ring of rifle, and brave John Folsom's heart sank within him as he realized that here was no mere marauding party, but a powerful band organized for deliberate vengeance. The Laramie plains were alive with darting, yelling, painted horsemen, circling about the ranch, hemming it in, cutting it off from the world.

The bullets came whistling through the morning air, biting fiercely into the solid logs, spattering the chinking, smashing pane after pane. Some of the dogs came howling and whining back for shelter, though the mastiffs held their ground, fiercely barking and bounding about, despite the whistles and

calls from the besieged who sought to save them to the last, but not once as yet had the ranch replied with a shot. Down in the cellar women clung together or clasped their wailing children and listened fearfully to the clamor. In Hal's room the fevered sufferer awoke from his stupor and, demanding his rifle, struggled to rise from the bed, and there John Folsom found Pappoose, pale and determined, bending over her weakened brother and holding him down almost as she could have overpowered a child. Lifting his son in his strong arms, he bore him to the cellar and laid him upon a couch of buffalo robes. "Watch him here, my child," he said, as he clasped her in his arms one moment. "But on no account let any one show above ground now. There are more of them than I thought, yet there is hope for us. Somebody is vexing them down the Laramie."

Bounding up the steps, the veteran was almost back at his post upon the porch when there came a sound that seemed to give the lie to his last words and that froze the hope that had risen in his breast —the sudden rumble and thunder of at least two hundred hoofs, the charging yell of an Indian band, the sputter and bang of rifles close at hand, and then a rush of feet, as, with faces agonized by fear, three of the men came darting within. "It's all

up! There's a million Indians!" they cried. Two of the demoralized fellows plunged into the passage that led to the cellar. One burst into childish wailing and clung to Folsom's knees.

"Let go, you coward!" yelled the old man in fury, as he kicked himself loose, then went bounding out upon the porch. God, what a sight! Sweeping up the gentle slope, brandishing rifles and lances and war-clubs, racing for their hapless prey, came fifty Ogallallas, Burning Star among the leaders. Bullets could not stop them now. The two men who had stood to their posts knelt grim and desperate, and Lannion's last shot took effect. Within fifty yards of the walls Burning Star's rushing pony went down on his nose, and in the fury of his pace, turned sudden and complete somersault, crushing his red rider under him, and stretching him senseless on the turf. An inspiration, almost God given, seemed to flash upon the old trader at the instant. Bareheaded, in his shirt sleeves, throwing upward and forward his empty hands, he sprang out as though to meet and rebuke his assailants. "Hold!" he cried, in the tongue he knew so well. "Are my brothers crazed? Look! I am no enemy It is your friend! It is old John!" And even in the rage of their charge, many Indians at sight of him veered to right and left; many reined up short

within ten paces of the unarmed man; two sprang from their ponies and threw themselves between him and their brethren, shouting to be heard. And then in the midst of furious discussion, some Indians crying out for the blood of all at the ranch in revenge for Chaska, some demanding instant surrender of every woman there in expiation for Lizette, some urging that old John be given respectful hearing, but held prisoner, there came lashing into their midst a young brave, crying aloud and pointing down the now well-lighted valley where, darting about a mile away, a few Indians were evidently striving to head off the coming of some hostile force. Leaving two or three of their number trying to restore consciousness to the stricken chief, and a dozen, Folsom's advocates among them, to hold possession of the ranch, away scurried most of the warriors at top speed to the aid of their outlying scouts.

Meantime, under cover of the fierce argument, Jake and Lannion had managed to crawl back within the building. Folsom himself, in such calm as he could command, stood silent while his captors wrangled. The warriors who pleaded for him were Standing Elk, a sub-chief of note, whose long attachment to Folsom was based on kindnesses shown him when a young man. the other was Young-Shows-

the-Road, son of a chief who had guided more than one party of whites through the lands of the Sioux before the bitterness of war arose between the races. They had loved Folsom for years and would not desert him now in the face of popular clamor. Yet even their influence would have failed but for the sound that told of hotter conflict still among the foothills along the opposite side of the valley. With straining ears, Folsom listened, hope and fear alternating in his breast. The mingling yells and volleying told that the issue was in doubt. Man after man of his captors galloped away until not half a dozen were left. Now, Jake and Lannion could have shot them down and borne him within, but to what good? Escape from the ranch itself was impossible! Such action would only intensify the Indian hate and make more horrible the Indian vengeance. For twenty minutes the clamor continued, then seemed to die gradually away, and, with fury in their faces, back at full gallop came a dozen of the braves. One glance was enough. They had penned their foe among the rocks, but not without the loss of several at least of their band, for the foremost rode with brandished war-club straight at Folsom, and despite the leap of his two champions to save, felled the old trader with one stunning blow, then gave the savage order to burn the ranch.

By this time the sun was just peering into the valley. The smoke and flame from the corral were dying or drifting away. Eagerly half a dozen young braves rushed for faggots and kindling with which to do his bidding, and a cry of despair went up from within the walls. Recklessly now Lannion and his comrade opened fire from the loopholes and shot down two of the dancing furies without, sending every other Indian to the nearest cover. But the arrows that came whistling speedily were firebrands. The besiegers gained in force with every moment. Poor old Folsom, slowly regaining senses as he lay bound and helpless down by the stream, whither his captors had borne him, heard the jeers and shouts of triumph with which the Indians within the corral were rapidly making their fire darts, when suddenly there rose on the morning air a sound that stilled all others, a sound to which the Indians listened in superstitious awe, a sound that stopped the hands that sought to burn out the besieged and paralyzed just long enough all inspiration of attack. Some of the Indians, indeed, dropped their arms, others sprang to the ponies as though to take to flight. It was the voice of Lizette, chanting the death song of the Sioux.

An hour later, once more in force, the band was gathered for its rush upon the ranch. Jake, gallant

fellow, lay bleeding at his post. Hope of every kind was well-nigh dead. The silence without was only portent of the storm so soon to burst. Pappoose, grasping her brother's rifle, crouched facing the narrow entrance to the cellar. Jessie clung to the baby, for Mrs. Hal, only dimly conscious, was moaning by her husband's side, while Lizette in silence was kneeling, watching them with strange glitter in her eyes. Suddenly she started, and with hand to ear, listened intently. Then she sprang to an air port and crouched there, quivering. Then again the ground began to tremble under the distant thunder of pony feet, louder and louder every second. Again came the rush of the Indian braves, but with it no exultant yell, only cries of warning, and as this sound swept over and beyond their walls, there followed another, the distant, deep-throated trooper cheer, the crack of carbine, the rising thunder of the cavalry gallop, and then the voice of Ned Lannion rang jubilantly over the dull clamor.

"Up! Up, everybody! Thank God, it's Dean and the boys!"

. . . . . .

Long years after, in the camps and stockades and the growing towns of the far West that almost

marvelous rescue was the theme of many an hour's talk. The number of men who took part in it, the number of hardy fellows who personally guided the troops or else stood shoulder to shoulder with Ned Lannion at the last triumphant moment, increased so rapidly with the growing moons that in time the only wonder was that anything was left of the Sioux. Official records, however, limited the number of officers and men engaged to a select few, consisting entirely of Lieutenant Loring, United States Engineers, Lieutenant Loomis, —th Infantry, a few men from scattered troops, "pickups" at Frayne and Emory, with Lieutenant Marshall Dean and fifty rank and file of Company "C."

Loring, it will be remembered, had taken a small detachment from Emory and gone into the hills in search of Burleigh. Loomis, fretting at the fort, was later electrified by a most grudgingly given order to march to the Laramie and render such aid as might be required by the engineer officer of the department. Dean, with only fifteen men all told, had dashed from Frayne straight for the ranch, and, marching all night, had come in sight of the valley just as it was lighted afar to the eastward by the glare of the burning buildings. "We thought it was all over," said he, as he lay there weak and languid, a few days later, for the wound reopened

in the rush of the fight, "but we rode on to the Laramie, and there, God be thanked! fell in with Loomis here and "C" Troop, heading for the fire. No words can tell you our joy when we found the ranch still standing and some forty Sioux getting ready for the final dash. That running fight, past the old home, and down the valley where we stirred up Loring's besiegers and sent them whirling too—why, I'd give a fortune, if I had it, to live it over again!"

But Loring, after all, had the most thrilling story to tell—of how he wormed a clew to Burleigh's hiding-place out of a captured outlaw and beat up the party in a nook of the hills, nabbed the major asleep, but was warned that all the Birdsall "outfit" would rally to the rescue, and so sent a courier to Emory for "C" Troop, and, making wide *détour* to avoid the gang, ran slap into the Sioux in the act of firing Folsom's ranch. Then he had to take to the rocks in the fight that followed, and had a desperate siege of a few hours, even Burleigh having to handle a gun and fight for his life. "I spotted him for a coward that day we stumbled on Red Cloud's band up by the Big Horn. You remember it, Dean. I thought him a villain when I learned how he was trying to undermine you. Time proved him a thief and a scoundrel, but, peace to his ashes, he died

like a gentleman after all, with two Indian bullets through him, and just as rescue came. He had time to make full confession, and it was all pretty much as I suspected. The note Dean picked up at Reno, that so stampeded him, told how a blackmailing scoundrel was on his way to Emory to expose him unless headed off by further huge payments. It was the fellow who called himself Newhall."

"The fellow who gave the tip to Birdsall's people?" said old Folsom at this juncture, raising a bandaged head from his daughter's lap. "Who was he, really?"

"Burleigh knew all the time and I suspected the moment I heard Miss Folsom's description, and was certain the instant I laid eyes on him. He was a rascally captain cashiered at Yuma the year before, and I was judge advocate of the court."

"And Mrs. Fletcher?" asked Pappoose, extending one hand to Jess, while the other smoothed the gray curls on her father's forehead.

"Mrs. Fletcher was his deserted wife, one of those women who have known better days."

The ranch is still there, or was twenty years ago, but even then the Sioux were said to raise more hair in the neighborhood than Folsom did cattle. The old trader had been gathered to his fathers, and Mrs. Hal to hers, for she broke down utterly

after the events of '68. Neither Pappoose nor Jessie cared to revisit the spot for some time, yet, oddly enough, both have done so more than once. The first time its chronicler ever saw it was in company with a stalwart young captain of horse and his dark-eyed, beautiful wife nine years after the siege. Hal met us, a shy, silent fellow, despite his inches. "Among other things," said he, "Lieutenant and Mrs. Loomis are coming next week. I wish you might all be here to meet them."

"I know," said Mrs. Dean, "we are to meet at Cheyenne. But, Hal, where's your wife?"

He looked shyer still. "She don't like to meet folks unless——"

"There's no unless about it," said the lady with all her old decision as she sprang from the ambulance, and presently reappeared, leading by the hand, reluctant, yet not all unhappy, Lizette. Some people said Hal Folsom had no business to marry an Indian girl before his wife was dead three years, but all who knew Lizette said he did perfectly right, at least Pappoose did, and that settled it. As for Loring— But that's enough for one story.

THE END.